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Mary Kathleen Shafer  
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**The Dissertation Committee for Mary Kathleen Shafer Certifies that this is the  
approved version of the following dissertation:**

**Marfa, Texas: A Historical and Cultural Geography**

**Committee:**

---

Paul Adams, Co-Supervisor

---

Steven Hoelscher, Co-Supervisor

---

Karl Butzer

---

Randy Lewis

---

Leo Zonn

**Marfa, Texas: A Historical and Cultural Geography**

**by**

**Mary Kathleen Shafer, B.A.; M.A.; M.F.A.**

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## **Dedication**

For the Marfans.



## **Acknowledgements**

Marfa is often characterized by its endless landscapes and incredible qualities of light. The name of this dissertation is borrowed from the book, *Carl Sauer: Land and Life*, a compilation of texts from the father of cultural geography.

# **Marfa, Texas: A Historical and Cultural Geography**

Mary Kathleen Shafer, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Co-Supervisor: Paul Adams

Co-Supervisor: Steven Hoelscher

Marfa is a town in far west Texas, three hours to the nearest commercial airport and one hour from the U.S.-Mexico border. The cultural landscape of Marfa includes a historic yet dying ranching community plagued by drought, as well as the remnants of a former military fort turned modern art museum. Marfa's slow shift from being just another small town to the darling of the art world has taken over twenty years, and its placement on a global cultural map has contributed to the commoditization of its place. Its evolution has been the work of its full and part time residents: those artists and arts patrons who were inspired to migrate to Marfa because of the artist Donald Judd. These people stayed because they saw the same potential and beauty that originally drew the legendary artist in the early 1970s, and by way of their actions Marfa has developed into a remarkable center of tourism that is no longer dependent on Donald Judd's vision.

The goal of this study is to investigate the space and place of Marfa using a range of methods from cultural geography and will contain a visual component. This multiperspectival approach will provide a historical picture of Marfa's shifting identity from ranching and railroad to art and tourism, against a background of a largely Hispanic community.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### **Into the Strange: *Prada Marfa***

It takes a long time to get to Marfa.

From El Paso, it's a three-hour, relatively easy drive southeast down Highway 10 to Route 90. El Paso isn't a terribly large city, but once you've arrived at the airport you're eager to get away from the noise and into the great wide strip of highway that leads straight into the heart of west Texas. There are roughly 120 miles to cover on 10, a bland American road that is, like much of the greater American highway system, distinguished only by its surrounding topography. Highways themselves are not immediately interesting, but they are literal gateways to areas that are; they are part of the journey. Getting to Marfa is a journey.

The colors in west Texas have a limited spectrum but the blues, yellows, and greens are endless. The bright sun blanches the yellows in the grasses, making them like old newspaper. Someone in Marfa told me that the shaft of the blue grama grass reflects light differently, depending on the time of year, and this wonderfully reasonable explanation offers a lovely way to understand the somewhat inexplicable quality of light that characterizes west Texas.

The greens of the mesquite and ambrosia change with the season, and are dependent on rainfall. Actually, a lot of things here are dependent on rainfall. Texas is driest at this western extremity, receiving less than 16 inches of rainfall per year (Figure

1.1),<sup>1</sup> and this aridity has crafted a quality of roughness in the flora and fauna, not to mention the folks. Survival here is a learned skill.

As you glance up at the big sky every so often, a relentlessly changing blue unfolds before you. At first bright, overexposed, as the sun passes then softer and deeper as the day turns to dusk.

Once you turn off of Highway 10 onto Route 90 and continue south, you don't pass too many cars on the two-lane road down to Marfa. The largest town you will pass on this seventy-mile stretch of 90 is Valentine, but 'town' is really a generous term. Valentine was a water stop on the Southern Pacific Railroad, founded in 1881.<sup>2</sup> Today, its population lingers below 200, and it fills only half a page in the West of the Pecos phone directory. It might be annotated on a map, but like every town within a hundred-mile vicinity it doesn't have much going on – that you can see. Whatever is happening usually happens behind closed doors, as far as possible from Texas' intense sunlight.

It's easy to miss a lot of the detail, because details in the landscape of the West can blend together into a collective emptiness, and driving exacerbates this. When you actively look, however, there are endless things to notice: the rusted and abandoned farming equipment; the small structures that are so romantically decaying, their faded and cracked paint creating a visual record of passing time; the cloud of dust thrown up by a ranch truck driving out in the ranchland. A modest Airstream nestled well off the highway becomes a gleaming landmark, and tumbleweeds skirt across the pavement. Even in a landscape this barren there is ample evidence of life and of activity, only it is spread out and often camouflaged by speed. A ranch home near the highway is more than

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<sup>1</sup> Annual mean precipitation for Marfa is 15.79 and for Presidio County is 10.76. Source: Texas State Climatologist, Texas A&M University.

<sup>2</sup> Jacobson, Lucy Miller., and Mildred Bloys Nored. *Jeff Davis County, Texas*. Fort Davis, TX: Fort Davis Historical Society, 1993.

just a house, for its imprint has extended well past any formal yard. There is no need to contain anything. Cars parked in the lawn slowly become ornamental and children's plastic and metal toys are carelessly left wherever. Their bright colors pop against the grass and dirt, and in an instant they are gone as you drive past. Some relics you miss by not peregrinating at leisure: old glass Coke bottles, beer cans rusted beyond legibility, a cattle carcass, one left shoe. While one cactus is decomposing another is blooming and vibrant. Lizards dashing around as you interrupt their otherwise undisturbed landscape.

There is an odd building in Valentine that you are sure to notice, because it seems so out of place in this land. On the west side of the road at the northern tip of Valentine is a small structure that belongs in New York's Soho neighborhood – not in west Texas. It is a Prada storefront, architecturally identical to its cosmopolitan sisters. Its sparse interior has authentic Prada footwear and handbags on display, as elitist and intimidating as any high-end retail store. There is no way to enter this small, pale structure, and there are no mannequins. There is, however, a revolving cycle of graffiti from visitors and locals ("Dumb" is a nicely succinct one);<sup>3</sup> something that the structure's creators, Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, had anticipated, but the frequency of graffiti and the structure's decay are happening faster than they had imagined. To add insult to injury, there are bullet markings on the 3/8-inch-thick polycarbonate windows (a replacement to the original plate glass)<sup>4</sup> that very clearly say "fuck you" to the high-brow art culture that has invaded Marfa. It's a gift from the locals who don't appreciate the irony behind a falsified Prada storefront "in the middle of nowhere."

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<sup>3</sup> Graczyk, Michael. "Fashion Meets west Texas in Unlikely Art Project." *Associated Press*, February 12, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Graczyk, Michael. "Vandals Target Quirky Artsy west Texas Prada Marfa." *The Washington Times*, March 25, 2011.

*Prada Marfa* (Figure 1.2) is a permanent installation by the aforementioned artists, completed in 2005 with the sponsorship of Ballroom Marfa and Art Production Fund, the former a non-profit art space in Marfa and the latter a non-profit art-commissioning fund based in New York. The minimalism of this storefront mirrors the minimalism that you will soon encounter in Marfa, and the installation acts as a preparation for the town you have traveled to see (at least, if you are coming from the west). It is an anomaly, a strange, specific object; it is something that both belongs and does not belong. It is a tourist attraction in a distant, desolate landscape, as is Marfa. *Prada Marfa* has become the background for countless photos, the backdrop of memories, a cultural marker to the traveling tourist. The installation signifies place and by way of this any photo taken of it or using it as a background messages a sense of ownership or accomplishment: I've been there. Were one to take another photo but without *Prada Marfa* in the background (perhaps facing the other side of the highway) the association to Marfa and to art is lost. Just like a photo in front of the White House or the Statue of Liberty signifies the place of Washington and New York City, respectively, a photo in front of *Prada Marfa* signifies the place of Marfa.

What's most curious about *Prada Marfa* is that it is not in Marfa. Although the art display is closer to Valentine, the artists distinctly wanted their work to carry the name Marfa.<sup>5</sup> This is an important point to make because Marfa is no longer just the name of a town. Marfa is a style, an identity, a character, and *Prada Marfa* is one of the first acts of commoditization of Marfa under the auspices of high art. The symbolism of the town revolves around its history: a transition from cow town to art town to tourist town, and it is all three of these at once. The sculpture has been troubled since its installation because

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<sup>5</sup> Graczyk, Michael. "Fashion Meets west Texas in Unlikely Art Project." *Associated Press*, February 12, 2006.

of the vandalism and because of the area's intense climate. The ruin of *Prada Marfa* has come to signify the cultural change that has taken place in Marfa. By way of its placelessness – or more colloquially, its location in the middle of nowhere – the art puts a spotlight on Marfa and thus feeds the growing tourism industry. What results is a town composed of residents who are drawn to the isolation of Marfa but who are witnessing a continued exportation of Marfa to the outside world, making them as a whole less isolated. In fact, it puts them in a bubble, to be gawked at and contemplated by outsiders like myself.

Still, most locals aren't terribly concerned about tourism or *Prada Marfa*. In some interviews, locals have had essentially no opinion of *Prada Marfa* – they didn't like it and they didn't hate it (although some do like it, and some most definitely hate it). Those who don't care, well, they just have other things to think about. This serves as a reminder that, although Marfa is presented to the outside world as a “quirky, artsy<sup>6</sup>” place – and certainly the outside world projects this onto Marfa as well – plenty of folks here have no association with that part of Marfa's identity. The place means different things to different people.

Marfa: Tough to get to. Tougher to explain. But once you get here, you get it.<sup>7</sup>

Well, let's hope so.

## **Rationale for the Study and Site Description**

Marfa and Presidio County were put “on the art-world map”<sup>8</sup> by one person, the artist Donald Judd. Although Marfa's identity has changed in the years since his 1994

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<sup>6</sup> Graczyk, Michael. "Vandals Target Quirky Artsy west Texas Prada Marfa." *The Washington Times*, March 25, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> This is the official slogan of the Marfa Visitor Center: [www.visitmarfa.com](http://www.visitmarfa.com)

death with incoming residents and foundations adding to the cultural landscape, Judd can unequivocally be credited with Marfa's cultural change. "This town was dead, dead, dead," says historian Cecilia Thompson. After two military installations closed at the end of World War II (Fort D.A. Russell and Marfa Army Airfield), followed by the seven-year drought in the 1950s, Marfa's population dwindled as locals moved away (Figure 1.3).

The evolution of Marfa's cultural geography and landscape has not yet been investigated in any real depth, and given Marfa's contemporary transformation and placement within a larger cultural network, a deeper look into the facets of its composition are overdue. In recent years, some researchers have touched on select areas of Marfa, including a detailed look at the history of the Chinati Foundation,<sup>9</sup> a short economics paper,<sup>10</sup> a historic airfield thesis,<sup>11</sup> and an arts and civic participation thesis.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, another dissertation in art history is currently underway.<sup>13</sup> But with the exception of a detailed two-volume tome by Cecilia Thompson<sup>14</sup> there exists no book on the history of Marfa in general, and none on what could be called its sense of place, situated in a condition of evolution and tension.

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<sup>8</sup> *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa, Texas). "Service Saturday for Donald Judd." February 17, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> Gaido Allen, Melissa Susan. *From the Dia to the Chinati Foundation: Donald Judd in Marfa, Texas, 1979-1994*. Thesis, Rice University, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Seman, Michael. "No Country for Old Developers: The Strange Tale of an Arts Boom, Bohemians, and "marfalafel" in the High Desert of Marfa, Texas." *Applied Research in Economic Development* 5, no. 3 (2008).

<sup>11</sup> Chandler, Kerry. "The Effects of Military Base Closures on Local Communities: The US Army Air Corps in west Texas." Thesis, Texas State University - San Marcos, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Hart, Alison. "The Arts and Civic Participation: A Case Study of Marfa, Texas." Thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Personal correspondence with Josh T. Franco, Binghamton University.

<sup>14</sup> Thompson, Cecilia. *History of Marfa and Presidio County, Texas, 1535-1946*. Austin, TX: Nortex Press, 1985.

Thompson's second volume ends in 1946, and while she and her collaborator, Louise O'Connor, were working on a third volume on Marfa's history up to 2005, Thompson passed away in January of 2012, and the eventual appearance of the third volume is to be hoped for. It is my intention to concentrate on Marfa during the period influenced by Donald Judd and his legacy, including what I will refer to as the post-Judd period.

Judd, a brilliant and legendary artist, left a legacy in both the museum that he created, The Chinati Foundation, and also his private living and work spaces in both Marfa and New York, managed by the Judd Foundation. The members of these organizations work to maintain his creations for future generations. This has not always been an easy process, but at present the wheels seem to grease themselves. The success, as it were, of Marfa, currently runs on its own popularity. The town has developed into a remarkable center of tourism.

It is in fact largely due to the earlier efforts of the Chinati and Judd Foundations, as well as members of the Marfa community, that Marfa has become the sort of destination that it is. Marfa's present identity is more and more that of a tourist mecca, which can be looked at from economic and cultural perspectives and – depending on who you talk to – the positive and negative (or, rather – complicated) implications of both. It is not my intention to write about Marfa with any slant towards or against the changes. If anything, I will reveal in this writing a fascination and respect for the small town. I am an observer, and a participant, and my writing and experience are my own.

Following his death in 1994, Judd quickly became something of a holy figure in the modern art community. Since that time, the journey to Marfa has become a pilgrimage of sorts for both artists and art patrons. It's a must-see for artists and non-artists alike. On his death, the Chinati Foundation and his estate (which would become

the Judd Foundation) were tasked with the responsibility of maintaining Judd's museum and his personal collections and properties, respectively – safeguarding his artistic vision – and this work largely revolves around what he did in Marfa. These organizations, constantly active in their duties, *produce* the space of Judd's Marfa. Their activity spans what Henri Lefebvre<sup>15</sup> would call representations of space, representational spaces, and spatial practices. They work to maintain Marfa's material landscape as well as promoting particular ways of seeing, imagining, and representing this space. And they also promote certain ways of inhabiting Marfa, which bring together both the material and the ideal Marfa.<sup>16</sup> While Marfa has a presence on a world much larger than its own borders, it is also in many ways just a small town in west Texas. In this way the reality of Marfa and the ideal Marfa are two separate things.

Marfa is not a given space, because all space is created. Marfa's existence and identity are directly owed to the people of its history, including but certainly not limited to Donald Judd. How the people of Marfa produce the space of Marfa will be investigated in this writing. Marfa is an active, engaging space that continues to transform – most notably through its tourism but also through the arrival of newcomers, including parents, who by choosing to raise their children here and to invest in both existing and new schools,<sup>17</sup> have dedicated time and energy to Marfa's future. Further, the artistic side of

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<sup>15</sup> Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Oxford, OX, UK: Blackwell, 1992.

<sup>16</sup> See Cosgrove, Denis E., and Stephen Daniels. *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of past Environments*. Cambridge [England: Cambridge University Press, 1988; Cosgrove, Denis E. *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998; Jackson, John Brinckerhoff. *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984; Tuan, Yi-fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977; Tuan, Yi-fu. *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

<sup>17</sup> In 2004, Marfa Montessori opened for a short time, and in 2010, a second Marfa Montessori reopened for children aged 3-6. In 2013, it joined the Marfa Independent School District (ISD). In 2012, the private Marfa International School (MIS) opened for grades 1-8, with 20 students in its first year. See Butcher, Sterry. "Montessori School to Open in Marfa." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa, Texas), August 5, 2004;



Marfa has come to mean more than Donald Judd. Marfa is saturated with talent, be it for visual art, film, music, writing, and more. The list is long. At once in line to become a ghost town, the present day Marfa is anything but. It has even appeared in a list of the best small towns in America.<sup>18</sup> That said, Marfa's geographic remoteness almost guarantees that its population will never exceed about 2,000 residents. The distance between Marfa and elsewhere is the filter that keeps it somewhat protected from any dramatic development, but nevertheless it is a changing town.

As a result of the careful maintenance and nurturing of culture, countless newspaper and magazine articles are published on Marfa each year, as well as a growing body of documentary pieces, both film and oral.<sup>19</sup> Writers from publications such as *The New York Times*, *Texas Monthly*, and *Travel and Leisure*<sup>20</sup> compose features that mull over Marfa's art and the strangeness of the town, but none have a satisfying conclusion. In the words of one resident who has been deeply invested in Marfa, "most of the articles get it wrong."<sup>21</sup> Instead, the authors seem to be in competition for a scoop that will never come. Some of the articles insist on a divided Marfa: rich and poor, art and non-art, Hispanic and white. As with any culture, the workings of Marfa are much more

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Glover, Richard Mark. "New Private School Opening in September." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa, Texas), May 3, 2012; Lindley, Rachel Osier, writer. "Interview: Mark Brandin." In *Talk at Ten*. Marfa Public Radio. July 23, 2012; Halpern, Alberto Thomas. "Marfa Montessori Teams up with Marfa ISD." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa, Texas), April 9, 2013; *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa, Texas). "Montessori Launches Third Year of Service." August 30, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Spano, Susan, and Aviva Shen. "The 20 Best Small Towns in America of 2012." *Smithsonian*, May 2012.

<sup>19</sup> For example, *Big Art in a One Horse Town*. Directed by Ian MacMillan. BBC, 1995. DVD; *Marfa: The Land and the Light*. Directed by Joseph CASHIOLA. KLRU: Arts in Context, 2011; Morley, Safer, writer.

"Marfa, Texas: The Capital of Quirkiness." In *60 Minutes*. CBS. April 14, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Lawlor, Julia. "The Great Marfa ... Land Boom." *The New York Times*, April 29, 2005; Lubow, Arthur. "The Art Land." *The New York Times*, March 20, 2005; Hall, Michael. "'The Buzz about Marfa Is Just Crazy'" *Texas Monthly*, September 2004, 136-42; Strickland, B. "Art Oasis." *Travel and Leisure*, September 2005, 86+; Wilsey, Sean, and Daphne Beal. "Lone Star Bohemia." *Vanity Fair*, July 2012; Green, Penelope. "A Moth to Marfa's Flame." *The New York Times*, February 29, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Tim Crowley.

complicated than simple binary divisions. Other journalists have limited their exploration and analysis of Marfa to just one facet of the town: Judd and the arts, and so have missed the proverbial forest for the tree. Finally, the language used to portray Marfa in these stories has implied aggression (clash, mafia, mob, stampedes, showdown, flocking) or increasingly moves towards an implication of culture and place (cool, scene, oasis, mecca, modernist, laid-back). Each story's focus continues to build on the outsider's perspective of Marfa<sup>22</sup> and thereby creates another avenue for cultural dissemination.

Marfa is an international destination, and that fact provides locals and tourists with a form of cultural capital. Pierre Bourdieu<sup>23</sup> was the first to use this term to make a distinction between economic, social and cultural forms of capital. To be a part of Marfa on various artistic terms is to gain this cultural capital. To have performed live music at the funeral-home-turned-live-music-venue-and-bar, Padre's, or to have been given a writing residency at the Lannan Foundation, or an artist residency at the Chinati Foundation, and so on, is a heavily weighted component of one's CV. Take Jeff Elrod, a Chinati artist in residence in 1998. His successful career literally developed because of his residency at Chinati when a New York art dealer "sent down a truck and filled it with every painting the artist had made during the last six months of his Chinati residency."<sup>24</sup> The rest is history. Further, because of Marfa's small size, it is common for artists to be interviewed on Marfa Public Radio (an NPR affiliate that began broadcasting in 2006) or profiled in *The Big Bend Sentinel* as a visiting artist, writer, or scholar. Economic changes in Marfa can be assessed in terms of tourism and taxes, but apart from those, the

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<sup>22</sup> See Relph, E. C. *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion, 1976; Urry, John, and Jonas Larsen. *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage Publications, 2002; Torres, Rebecca Maria, and Janet D. Momsen. "Gringolandia: The Construction of a New Tourist Space in Mexico." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95, no. 2 (2005): 314-35.

<sup>23</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

<sup>24</sup> Wilsey, Sean, and Daphne Beal. "Lone Star Bohemia." *Vanity Fair*, July 2012.

cultural capital that pervades this small ranching community is something that cannot be denied and that is begging for further exploration.

Many of the interviewees with whom I have spoken touted Marfa's unique placement as a cultural center as a reason to live there. Between the programming of the Chinati and Judd Foundations, Ballroom Marfa, Padre's, Marfa Book Company and the Lannan Foundation, among others, one can see authors, musicians, artists and the like throughout any given week. While this would not be anything special in a larger city, it is remarkable in a town boasting a population that hovers around two thousand.

Marfa is sometimes referred to as an artist's mecca or an artist's colony, and while it is a mecca of sorts for the arts-religious, an artist's colony implies an intention that I believe is lacking in Marfa. Its growth has been organic and unplanned, and many of its residents don't want it to become "another Santa Fe."<sup>25</sup> Further, Marfa is, in many regards, just another small town, but its transformation over the past fifty years has undoubtedly altered its identity from both a local and tourist vantage point. The destination, for many, is the experience of permanent art installations, but there is more to Marfa than art. Still, the placing of Marfa to the outside world has focused attention to this one aspect of its identity, and because of its success, there are other towns that seek to mimic what Marfa has become.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Tim Crowley. Crowley argues that Marfa does not compare to Santa Fe for a number of reasons, including the large population difference and the fact that Marfa remains more remote than Santa Fe (whereas Santa Fe has a major highway through it, a commercial airport, and a large university). Further, he argues that the quality of art in Marfa has "substance" where Santa Fe's art tourism serves a consumer population.

<sup>26</sup> "Buy a First Edition in Archer City." *Texas Monthly*, March 2010, 180. Accessed July 2, 2013. <http://www.texasmonthly.com/story/bucket-list/page/0/8>; Adelstein, Edie. "Green Mountain Falls, the next Marfa?" *Colorado Springs Independent*, November 1, 2012; Thompson, Jonathan. "Forgiving Winslow, Arizona – Not Just Another Marfa." *High Country News*, September 9, 2013.

## Methodologies

The goal of this study is to investigate the landscape, space and place of Marfa using a range of methods from cultural geography. Building on this I can discuss Marfa in terms of tourism theory and site-specificity, two components I believe are essential to its identity. Marfa is a fitting and ideal place in which to explore the visual aspects of place and landscape, through studies of its working artists as well as by employing photography and other media as research tools to explore nonverbal but nonetheless compelling aspects of meaning. The changes in Marfa can be read in the present day landscape, through new construction or the refurbishment of older architecture, and the upkeep of historic buildings reflecting Marfa's history. Marfa teeters on a line of polished minimalism on one side and casual laissez-faire vernacular on the other. To sway too much to one side would alter the place of Marfa. The place of Marfa is a balance of both these styles and attitudes.

To a large degree this is an outsider's view of Marfa, but I involve as much as possible the multiple histories of the town, each of which contributes to the larger whole. I have incorporated interviews with various residents and other stakeholders to tell Marfa's history from these different perspectives.

My research has consisted of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, analysis of writings on Marfa and historical data, and lastly through my own visual methods as an artist. I have interviewed about 60 people (Appendix A) and participated in myriad cultural productions, including a three-month internship at the non-profit cultural space, Ballroom Marfa. I traveled back and forth between Austin and Marfa frequently between 2011 and 2013. Through narrative description,<sup>27</sup> theoretical

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<sup>27</sup> Tuan, Yi-Fu. "Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 81, no. 4 (1991): 684-96.

integration, and the visuals that help to analyze the various data, I will present to the reader a portrait of Marfa that explores new ways in which to understand this small and fascinating town.

What I hope to accomplish through this research and writing is a modern rendering of geography's *terra incognita*.<sup>28</sup> There may be no place yet uncovered in literal terms, but there are always new ways to approach an understanding of the landscape that surrounds us. Marfa in particular is an ideal place of study because its small physical size stands in marked contrast to its significant cultural footprint. Further, despite its popularity and growing international presence, Marfa is in many ways still an unknown land to outsiders. It is a place that wants to hold onto its history as a ranching community in a landscape that has been devastated by this same industry. It is a place that inspired a world-renowned artist to move there and explore alternative and permanent ways of exhibiting art in a landscape that often inspired the subsequent creations. It is a place that is populated mostly by Hispanics, but their experience of Marfa is not the focus of the media's attention. It is a place near the border to Mexico, which has contributed to its history and present occupation by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection. It is a place of change, and although all places are places of change, Marfa is special because it has the eyes of the world watching.

## **Dissertation Overview**

This writing is an academic narrative. The story relates to my research in geography and to the overall history and story of Marfa and its placement in a larger

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<sup>28</sup> Wright, John K. "Terra Incognita: The Place of the Imagination in Geography." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 37, no. 1 (1947): 1-15.

cultural network. I use thick description<sup>29</sup> to place myself within Marfa's space, to detail what Yi-Fu Tuan would call experiential perspective.<sup>30</sup> In light of this I should place myself within the framework in which I work: I was an independent studies major at New York University and so have always been interested in inter-disciplinary studies to explore my environment. There I trained as a photographer and an anthropologist, and I have long been interested in the landscape and the built environment. Unlike Margaret Mead, who chose to study distant cultures ultimately to better understand her own, I have chosen to study places that are close to me, because I believe there is much to be discovered there about ourselves. As a visual artist I have always been interested in the landscape, and in particular the ways that we affect it, directly and indirectly.

My graduate work at Maryland Institute College of Art allowed me to focus specifically on one type of landscape: airfields. I traveled all around the country, and still do, photographing these spaces. I came to Marfa in 2007 for a dual purpose: I was photographing mostly abandoned airfields in the area and I had wanted to visit Judd's spaces in Marfa. Like most people who speak fondly of Marfa, I was immediately drawn to the landscape. After I completed my master's degree, I knew that I wasn't finished with school. My research into airfields had led me deep into various towns' (and this country's) aviation history, and that meant that I was interested in more than purely visual work: I wanted the complete picture, and I wanted to make connections to other topics. After thinking about what, exactly, were the core areas of my interest as an artist – space, place, and landscape – it became clear that geography would be my path.

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<sup>29</sup> Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

<sup>30</sup> Tuan, Yi-fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.

During the spring semester of my first year at UT, I was given the opportunity to intern at Ballroom Marfa during the summer, and the topic of my dissertation essentially presented itself. Marfa, the inspiring landscape of light and color and vastness, would be my project. And so, using visual art and methods of cultural anthropology and cultural geography, I have looked at the place of Marfa over the past three years. I will in these pages discuss the various components that collectively create the place of Marfa. I am an outsider to Marfa, which helps me to be as objective as possible, but I do acknowledge that my perspective is my own, and that I am biased towards a critical thinking of art and tourism and landscape.

Marfa is an hour from the border to Mexico and its population is largely Hispanic.<sup>31</sup> It cannot be denied that these factors contribute to the identity of Marfa and I will do my best to investigate them. That being said, I believe that Marfa's placement on the cultural map has nothing to do with its geography or demographics. Further, for the residents of Marfa who have little interest in participating in the various artistic and cultural events, their Marfa is a very different place. At the risk of oversimplifying the residents of Marfa, I will divide them into three groups: Hispanics, ranchers, and artists. I use the general term "artists" to refer to artists, writers, and musicians. I realize that I am perhaps forcing the complexity of the residents' identities into three neat categories, but I believe that the Venn style illustrates a certain "cross-pollination" that exists in Marfa.

Marfa's popularity and outsider interest will continue to attract additional academic investigations by future scholars.<sup>32</sup> Marfa is a shifting place and its smallness and uniqueness have come together to create a special appeal to tourists. We know now

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<sup>31</sup> Marfa is 69% Hispanic. Source: 2010 U.S. Census.

<sup>32</sup> Personal correspondence with Josh Franco, Binghamton University; Seman, Michael. "No Country for Old Developers: The Strange Tale of an Arts Boom, Bohemians, and "marfalafel" in the High Desert of Marfa, Texas." *Applied Research in Economic Development* 5, no. 3 (2008).

that in looking at such varied, small places we can make connections to larger cultural trends, and there is much cultural and social value in promoting and maintaining these wonderfully complex areas of our nation. Further, the popular perceptions of places that become popular – whatever the reason – are often narrowly focused or limited in scope. I will attempt to be thorough in my investigation of Marfa, but my review will not be all encompassing. Beyond my own research there is much more work to be done on Marfa.

Chapter Two provides a brief history of Marfa beginning with the native and colonial occupants. Next, the development of the railroad, the large ranching community, and the military occupation defined the early 20th century in Marfa. After the military's abandonment, environmental factors contributed to a declining economy, and Marfa was fast becoming a desolate and forgotten place. I will also look at the naming of Marfa, which has a curiously much-debated explanation. I will then discuss Marfa's placement near the U.S.-Mexico border and how this has affected its people and culture.

Chapter Three focuses on the core terms of geography, in which I have placed my discussion of Marfa: landscape, space and place. I will look at how these terms relate to each other and how they relate specifically to an understanding of Marfa. I will describe the landscape, as seen from the ground and above, and describe the ways in which place is experienced. I will also discuss the term "placelessness" in regard to Marfa, in the sense that it is simply a small town and not unlike many small towns in America. That being said, through the discussion of place in Marfa I will show that it is anything but placeless.

Chapter Four focuses on the work of the artist Donald Judd. I will look at the many spaces he purchased and refurbished in Marfa, and how they contribute to the town's identity and the ongoing cultural shift. I will also make a correlation between the geographer's notions of space and place and how this relates to Judd's notions of the



same two concepts. Then, I will look at the changes that occurred after Judd passed, and how the incoming residents continued to install a needed infrastructure in Marfa to sustain and attract a continuing influx of new residents and businesses. There is a growing array of cultural institutions now based in Marfa, which continues to expand and define the town.

Chapter Five focuses on tourism as it relates to the recent identity of Marfa and its contribution to the changes going on. I will discuss the Marfa Mystery Lights, those unexplainable phenomena that have spooked, delighted and confounded residents and tourists since the first recorded sighting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The chapter also focuses on some films that have been shot in Marfa and how they contribute to the sense of place, as well as to the growth in film tourism.

Chapter Six features my own visual work produced in and about Marfa. This is not an attempt at illustrating the text, but instead is its own research tool. Not only do the physical acts of photography and visual art offer me a way to read, see, and understand the landscape, but they also create multiple frozen moments of place that can then be read and interpreted by others. Visual art is a research tool used to aid in a written and oral discussion, but it is also an end in itself.

Finally, Chapter Seven visualizes various event and media data on Marfa, showing a notable increase in the last twenty years. I will then discuss the culmination of history and culture into a modern Marfa style and identity, one that is being commoditized and transformed into a brand. Although this creates opportunities to its residents by way of incoming tourist dollars, it also has the potential to ultimately reduce Marfa to a place of superficiality. A prospect for future research will then propose continued avenues into the investigation of place in Marfa.

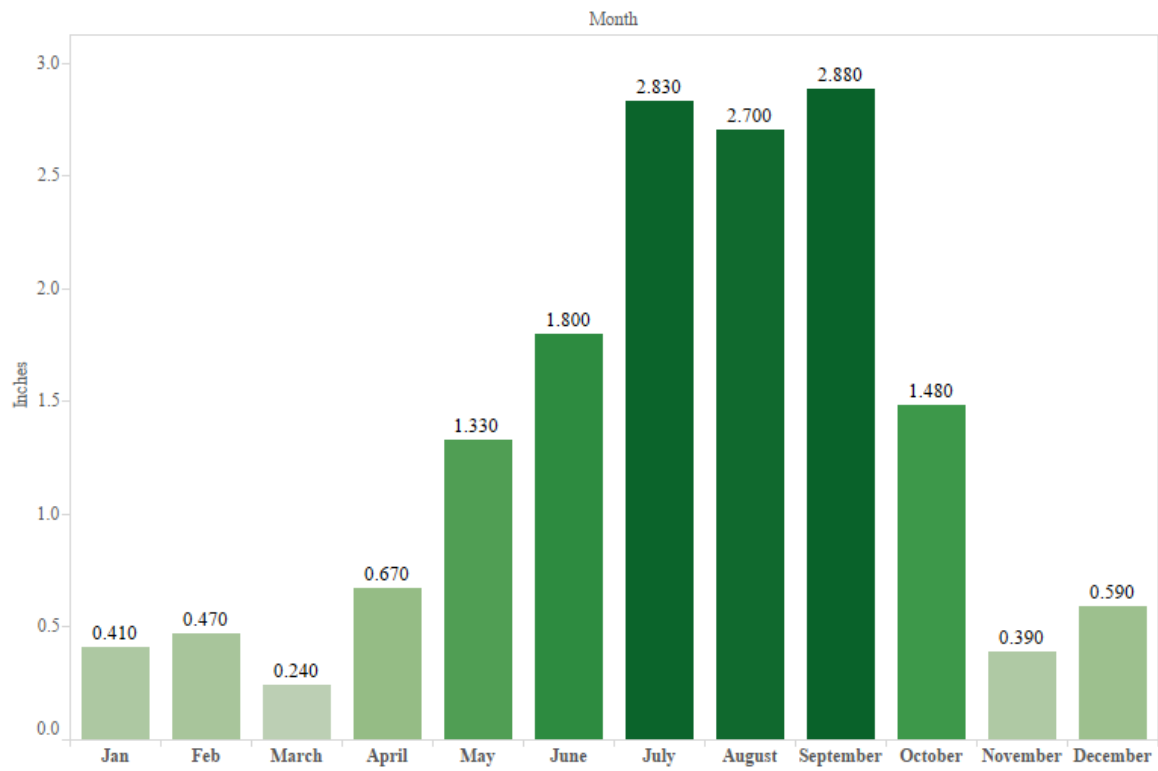


Figure 1.1: Mean Precipitation for Marfa 1971-2000, from the Texas State Climatologist, Texas A&M University



Figure 1.2: *Prada Marfa*, taken in 2011 by author

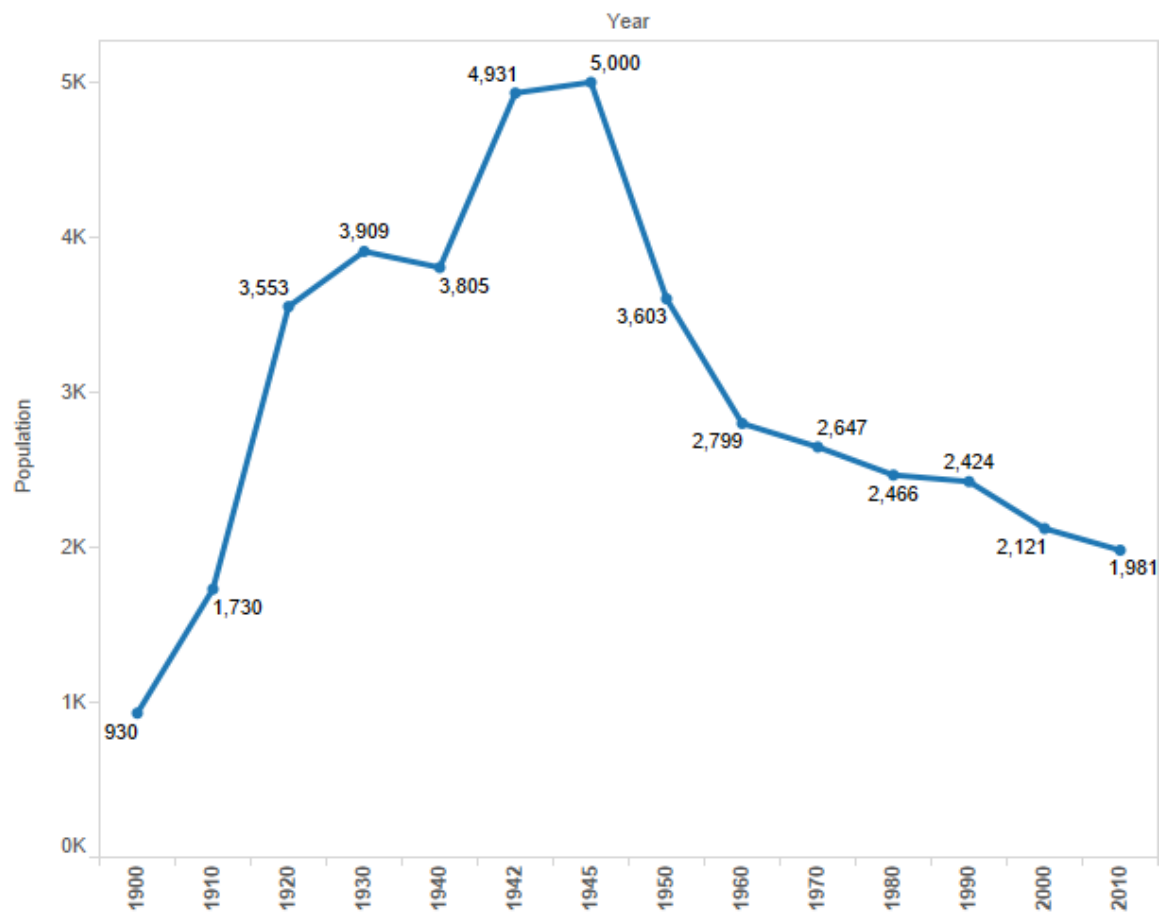


Figure 1.3: Population of Marfa 1900-2010, from U.S. Census data

## CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF MARFA

### Native and Colonial History

All history depends on earlier histories.<sup>33</sup> While the history of the town of Marfa begins with the railroad, the geologic, Mexican, and Native American histories had long before established the landscape of west Texas. Throughout the region one can find rock art that is attributed to Native Americans and even some Spanish conquistadors,<sup>34</sup> evidence of a culture and people scarcely present today. In reviewing the history of Marfa and its surrounding landscape an understanding of how and why it is the place it is today can be gained.

Comanche and Apache Native Americans had at various times occupied the area that is now Presidio County, but they didn't establish themselves like the white settlers eventually would. Mexicans had occupied parts of the area as well, despite the fact that the terrain was "hostile to people and (could) support only small populations."<sup>35</sup> The early Spanish colonists of the sixteenth century were the first European explorers in the area,<sup>36</sup> and they called the land "el despoblado," or "the unhabited place." They left this land largely ignored for many years, but driven by expansion efforts finally decided to make a more permanent military presence. The Spanish influence on this area

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<sup>33</sup> Knowles, Anne Kelly. *Placing History: How Maps, Spatial Data, and GIS Are Changing Historical Scholarship*. Redlands, CA: ESRI Press, 2008, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Lowrance, Miriam. "A Review of Rock Art Research in the Big Bend of Texas," from Smith-Savage, Sheron, and Robert J. Mallouf. *Rock Art of the Chihuahuan Desert Borderlands: Including Papers Presented at the First Trans-Pecos Rock Art Symposium, Alpine, Texas, February 17-19, 1995*. Alpine, TX: Center for Big Bend Studies, Sul Ross State University, 1998.

<sup>35</sup> Morgenthauer, George J. *The River Has Never Divided Us: A Border History of La Junta De Los Rios*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Álgvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca reached the area in 1534.

“effectively doomed”<sup>37</sup> the native tribes, and the military activity throughout the region dictates a large part of its history. (“Presidio” translated means “fort,” although it curiously also has a secondary meaning of “prison.”) West Texas remains one of the least populated areas of the United States.<sup>38</sup>

In 1821, Mexico gained its independence from Spain, and in 1836, Texas gained its independence from Mexico. Texas joined the United States in 1845, and the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848 greatly altered the political development of the area. Before 1848, the state of Chihuahua had occupied land much farther north than its current boundary, the Rio Grande. In the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo the question of land ownership was addressed, although it was brief and vague. Further, the United States rejected parts of the treaty, including an article that offered protection to Mexican citizens.<sup>39</sup> Although the United States paid \$15 million for its new territory (the land north of the Rio Grande), the previous ownership was essentially taken from the native inhabitants, who had been occupying the land for generations.

The land of Presidio County is a part of the Chihuahuan Desert, an ecoregion that in the United States spans western Texas into parts of New Mexico and Arizona, and the states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Durango, Zacatecas and Nuevo León in Mexico (Figure 2.1). Marfa is situated at the northern slant of this desert at an elevation of 4,688 feet. It is also situated more or less in the center of the Marfa basin, the smallest piece of the larger Permian basin, which characterizes most of west Texas. The land was a part of an epeiric sea during the Cambrian to Mississippian periods. Some of the animals found in the area are the Desert Mule Deer, the Pronghorn Antelope, and in mountainous areas, the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

<sup>39</sup> For a detailed discussion of the treaty see Morgenthauer, George J. *The River Has Never Divided Us: A Border History of La Junta De Los Rios*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004.

Carmen Mountain Whitetail and the exotic Aoudad. Elk, buffalo, badgers, porcupines, Grey Foxes, Blue Quails and Eurasian Collared Doves, javelina, coyotes, jackrabbits, desert tarantulas and mountain lions occupy the area in addition to many bird and lizard species.

This desert region is characterized by little rainfall, harsh sun, and rugged terrain. Author Susan Tweit describes the Chihuahuan Desert:

Green is as rare as shade. The desert is neither soft nor appealing. Its shapes are hard and angular; the plants are studded with spines and thorns; the animals are armed with venom and stingers. Its disquieting landscape of huge spaces and its uncompromisingly harsh climate shrink humans and their work to a very, very small size.<sup>40</sup>

While the Apache and Comanche tribes were more nomadic, the white settlers arrogantly found the land of west Texas to be theirs for the taking. One of the first ranchers in the area, Lucas (Luke) Brite, wrote an essay reflecting on his life of ranching and his arrival to west Texas:

The beautiful valleys bordered by mountains were untouched by man. As far as we know this spot had been in waiting since the dawn of creation for development that it might contribute to the support and dominion of man.<sup>41</sup>

Brite's estate would eventually span 125,000 acres of land for his Hereford cattle, and it is still managed today by his heirs.<sup>42</sup> Although much of west Texas remains

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<sup>40</sup> Tweit, Susan J. *Barren, Wild, and Worthless: Living in the Chihuahuan Desert*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995.

<sup>41</sup> Brite, Luke. "Reflections," quoted in Thompson, Cecilia. *History of Marfa and Presidio County, Texas, 1535-1946*. Austin, TX: Nortex, 1985, 2011.

<sup>42</sup> The manager, Jim White III, is a 4<sup>th</sup> generation grandson.

undeveloped, the land has been regularly ranched since the mid-nineteenth century. As a result, the people of Marfa have a strong association with ranching, which remains a cultural force to the community. However, Marfa is no longer a true ranching town, and the remaining ranches in Marfa have received \$5,198,222 in subsidies from 1995 to 2012.<sup>43</sup> The landscape – for ranchers – is damaged.

Marfa was established in 1883 as a water stop on the expanding Southern Pacific Railway line. The state of Texas was eager to occupy and settle its land holdings, and the expansion of the railroad allowed for this. The arrival of the railroad secured an economic base and provided an opportunity for business and land expansion to these early entrepreneurs' cattle and mining operations, as well as the military landscape of the Texas Rangers already in place. Nearly three decades earlier, in 1854, the United States and Mexican Boundary Survey had officially established the Rio Grande as the official border between the countries.<sup>44</sup> The proximity to and relationship with Mexico would dictate much of the military occupation in the area, and the modern U.S. Customs and Border Protection remains an important employer and political marker for the Big Bend. Over the next several pages I will take you through Marfa's early years leading up to the artist Donald Judd's early-1970s arrival, which will span about 89 years of history.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Source: Environmental Working Group, <http://farm.ewg.org/index.php>

<sup>44</sup> United States Department of the Interior. *Report on the United States and Mexican Boundary Survey :made under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior by William H. Emory, Major First Cavalry, and United States Commissioner*. Rep. Vol. Three Volumes, Bound in Two. Washington, DC: C. Wendell, Printer, 1857-59. The survey had been a joint effort between both sides of the river. As the area to survey was large, this accounts for why it took this long to complete following the Mexican-American War.

<sup>45</sup> Much of this Chapter is owed to Cecilia Thompson's *History of Marfa and Presidio County* (specifically Volume II) and the writings of historian Lonn Taylor, as well as the archives of *The New Era* and *The Big Bend Sentinel*, digitally archived at Sul Ross University and available online. While Thompson's history is essential to understanding the place of Marfa before Donald Judd's arrival, she fails to acknowledge or discuss the destruction of the land due to ranching, instead focusing on the image of the rancher as a pioneer. While the ranching history is essential to the story of Marfa, it is also important to note that ranching is not natural to the desert landscape of Presidio County.



## **The Railroad and Ranching**

In the summer of 1881, the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio line of the Southern Pacific Railway was slowly being built westward from San Antonio and eastward from El Paso in what would become the third transcontinental railroad in the United States. The expansion of the railroad would provide needed access from farm to market to all parties involved and allow goods to travel farther. White ranchers already settled in the Fort Davis area would add more land to their holdings, expanding first cattle and later sheep herds. The original beef stock was primarily the Texas Longhorn but would move to the Shorthorn (predictably, the Marfa High School mascot) and later grow to include the prized Hereford breed.<sup>46</sup>

The railway line reached Marfa on January 16, 1882. Marfa and the other small towns of the Big Bend were literal water stops (also called “tank towns”) along the line of the railroad, because the steam engine needed a replenishment of water on a regular basis. Today we can measure this history by the average thirty-minute drive from one tank town to the next. The line would be completed end to end in 1883.

Along with the obvious impact of providing the transport of goods from one coast to the next, the fact that the railroad went through Marfa and not Fort Davis would later play into politics. Fort Davis, roughly twenty miles north of Marfa, had already established itself as the seat of Presidio County in 1875, and both the Texas Rangers and Civil War soldiers occupied a base there.<sup>47</sup> It would have made sense to run the railroad

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<sup>46</sup> Thompson, Cecilia. *History of Marfa and Presidio County, Texas, 1535-1946*. Austin, TX: Nortex, 1985.

<sup>47</sup> Fort Davis was built in 1854 and its early military occupants protected freight trains from Comanche and Apache attacks. See: Wooster, Robert. *Frontier Crossroads: Fort Davis and the West*. College Station: Texas A & M UP, 2006; Gwynne, S. C. *Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History*. New York: Scribner, 2010.

through this already established town. However, the established ranchers of Fort Davis requested and were granted a bypass - perhaps because they didn't want the noise of traffic that the railroad would bring.<sup>48</sup> It can only be speculated as to what kind of landscape there would be in the area Marfa now occupies had the path of the railroad been laid elsewhere. It has been argued that the development of the railroad was an aggressive business<sup>49</sup> and, although the details vary from site to site, the development of the Pacific Railway line through west Texas was very much controlled and manufactured.

In March of 1883 a request was sent to Washington, DC by a proposed postmaster of Marfa for the establishment of a post office in town. On it was written the current population of Marfa, about 150.<sup>50</sup> Over the next two years Marfa would grow considerably, enough so that in 1885 the county seat was moved there from Fort Davis. The exact details of this transaction seem to be lost and much is left to speculation (and accusation – some stories involving a mysterious fire)<sup>51</sup> but it can be reasoned that the early landowners of the Big Bend each wanted the county seat in their own towns, so that they could further establish themselves as key figures, securing their futures and those of their families.

What did eventually play out is the division of Fort Davis, Alpine (which had first been known as Osborne, then Murphysville),<sup>52</sup> and Marfa into three separate county seats: Fort Davis as the seat of Jeff Davis County, Alpine as the seat of Brewster County, and Marfa as the seat of Presidio County.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Thompson, Cecilia. *History of Marfa and Presidio County, Texas, 1535-1946*. Austin, TX: Nortex, 1985.

<sup>49</sup> Hudson, John C. *Plains Country Towns*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1985.

<sup>50</sup> Thompson, Cecilia. *History of Marfa and Presidio County, Texas, 1535-1946*. Austin, TX: Nortex, 1985.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Source: <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hfa05>

<sup>53</sup> Jacobson, Lucy Miller., and Mildred Bloys Nored. *Jeff Davis County, Texas*. Fort Davis, TX: Fort Davis Historical Society, 1993. Print.

In 1885, a contract was awarded to build both Marfa's courthouse and the county jail, and in 1886, *The New Era* newspaper was established. An eerie historic photo of the completed courthouse (Figure 2.2) resembles in its starkness the Benedict ranch house in the 1956 Marfa-filmed epic *Giant* (Figure 2.3): both structures are large, intrusive on the landscape, and surrounded by space. While the fictional Benedict house remained a solo structure throughout the film, the actual Presidio County courthouse became the center and visual anchor to Marfa, and development moved outward from its point (Figure 2.4). Further, the courthouse would also act as a social center for town events, and its mostly lush, green lawns were often used for reading, playing and relaxing. The courthouse is three and a half stories high, a Second Empire structure with four corner towers and Mansard roofs and a large Brunelleschi-like dome on octagonal drum/brick construction.<sup>54</sup> The brick was made in Marfa and the pinkish stone is native to Texas, and together these create a whimsical and classic courthouse.

By the turn of the century, Marfa had expanded into a prosperous shipping center of both sheep and cattle, and was growing in residents and status throughout the region, reaching a population of 930 by 1900.<sup>55</sup> In an 1897 *New Era* (as quoted by a later *Big Bend Sentinel*)<sup>56</sup> Marfa was poetically if not strategically described. "MARFA HAS," it read:

Two hotels.  
Two saloons.  
One railroad.  
Two churches.  
One fruit store.  
One lumber yard.

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<sup>54</sup> Thompson, Cecilia. *History of Marfa and Presidio County, Texas, 1535-1946*. Austin, TX: Nortex, 1985.

<sup>55</sup> Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

<sup>56</sup> *Big Bend Sentinel*, November 6, 1930.

One livery stable.  
One barber shop.  
Two meat markets.  
\$95,000 Court house.  
Ladies' Aid Society.  
One Job printing office.  
One boot and shoe shop.  
One weekly newspaper.  
One blacksmithing place.  
One wood working shop.  
Stockyards and shipping pens.  
A Ministering Childrens' League.  
Four dry goods and grocery stores.  
Small but well ordered grave yard.  
Over 60 pupils enrolled in the public school.  
Good wagon roads leading out in every direction.  
A fine system of water works with over two miles of mains.  
Situated 460 miles from San Antonio and 196 miles from El Paso on the  
Southern Pacific Ry. Ninety miles from the Mexican border.

*Why come to this country?*

Because the climate is perfect.  
Because the soil is perfect and prolific.  
Because the land is abundant and cheap.  
Because a home can be made with little labor.  
Because life is a luxury in a land where the sun shines every day.  
Because there are chances for a poor man which he never hope to find in  
older countries.  
Because the country is advancing and property values are increasing.  
Because the vast and varied resources of the country are yet to be  
developed.  
Because good land is becoming more scarce, and if you don't catch on  
now, your last chance will soon be gone.  
Because the worker receives a fair compensation for his labor, and the  
"rustler" has a field for the display of his energy and enterprise.  
Because the wealth of grazing lands will soon build up a great and  
prosperous country.  
Because the settler need not spend a life time in felling trees and grubbing  
out stumps.

The implications of Manifest Destiny can be seen in this newspaper boosterism. The climate may have been “perfect” for some, and the soil may have been “perfect” for early ranchers. However, the reason to come to Marfa has changed drastically since this early period. While the quantity and type of stores is about the same today as it was more than 100 years ago, land is no longer abundant, nor is it cheap.

Ranching life in Marfa was difficult, especially during a dry spell or drought.<sup>57</sup> The men were often gone on long cattle drives, leaving women to fend for and entertain themselves. Neighbors relied on each other, much more so than modern ranching allows.<sup>58</sup> The use of fencing would change ranching<sup>59</sup> and modern amenities and technologies would encourage even more change. However, with that change came opportunity, and the developments in ranching gave each rancher the opportunity to either persevere or fail. As Thompson was wont to discuss in her history or during interviews,<sup>60</sup> the difficulty of ranching in west Texas is what contributed to the cultural heritage of the community. Ranchers, and west Texas ranchers in particular, were a tough class of people, private and independent. Their ability to ranch in a desert landscape was linked to their strength and resourcefulness.

Marfa continued a slow but steady development into the 1930s, whereby incoming residents purchased and ranched land, businesses opened in the town center, and social life was important. The population was on a steady incline until the 1930s, and during World War II the town saw a dramatic increase due to the presence of the Marfa

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Chip Love; Burnett, John, writer. "How One Drought Changed Texas Agriculture Forever." In *Weekend Edition*. NPR. July 7, 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Thompson, Cecilia. *History of Marfa and Presidio County, Texas, 1535-1946*. Austin, TX: Nortex, 1985.

<sup>59</sup> Hayter, E. W. "Barbed Wire Fencing: A Prairie Invention: Its Rise and Influence in the Western States." *Agricultural History* 13, no. 4 (1939): 189-207. While too much of a tangent for this writing, the history and impact of fencing is quite interesting.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Cecilia Thompson and Kolker, Jason Oslo, writer. "Interview with Cecilia Thompson." In *Talk at 10*. Marfa Public Radio. April 13, 2011.

Army Airfield and the increased activity at Fort D.A. Russell (Figure 1.3). However, a lifetime cycle of rain and drought would prevent the town from ever becoming too large, for its ranchers constantly struggle to do what they can with the land: the terrain is hostile.

Marfa was a trade and shipping center for exterior towns such as Terlingua, Shafter, and Ruidoso in these first 35 years. Along the region's active silver mining, area ranchers were supplying the rest of the country with beef. Although Texas in general is known for its oil, west Texas specifically is instead known for its cattle. Many would try for oil (and some still do), but Presidio County is a dry landscape.<sup>61</sup> There isn't oil and there isn't a lot of water either.

In 1907, about the time that the first automobiles arrived, electricity came to Marfa. One article in the newspaper described "Marfa, City of Lights" with awe.<sup>62</sup> Marfa's association with light references various things: the lights of early twentieth century electricity, the Marfa Mystery Lights, the sparkle of the stars made even brighter with the Dark Skies Initiative,<sup>63</sup> and the bright light of the Texas sun that continues to draw people to town, whether temporarily or permanently. Even the collection of the Chinati Foundation in Marfa is seen only through natural light, with the exception of the artist Dan Flavin's installation.

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<sup>61</sup> In other parts of west Texas (Midland, Odessa, and other areas outside of the Chihuahuan Desert) the business of oil continues. See Osborne, James. "After Decades of Busts and Booms, Oil Fields around Midland and Odessa Are ..." *Dallas Morning News*, November 2, 2013. Accessed November 6, 2013. [http://res.dallasnews.com/interactives/2013\\_November/oilboom/](http://res.dallasnews.com/interactives/2013_November/oilboom/).

<sup>62</sup> As quoted in Thompson, Cecilia. *History of Marfa and Presidio County, Texas, 1535-1946*. Austin, TX: Nortex, 1985.

<sup>63</sup> The International Dark-Sky Association was founded in 1988 to prevent and stop light pollution.

## The Name Marfa

The source of Marfa's name is a debated topic, and although it seems like a small matter, the details represent a larger significance to Marfa's cultural identity. Until recently, it was widely written and accepted that Marfa's name came from a character in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, although his *Crime and Punishment* has also been named as the source<sup>64</sup> for reasons unclear. That Dostoevsky used the name Marfa for nine different characters in six novels is no help in narrowing down a source text.<sup>65</sup> It is unclear where *The Brothers Karamazov* rumor first started, but in most writings on Marfa it has been widely accepted that this Russian book was the source, despite some questions about the theory's plausibility -- not to mention an earlier source that points to a different text.<sup>66</sup>

We do know that the railroad executive's wife, Hanna Maria Strobridge, was the one to name the town, as she did others along the railroad's path. A woman in her position would have been well educated and well traveled, so it is no surprise that she would have been reading various now-classic texts. Looking at other towns in Texas we are presented with other literary characters, including Longfellow, Emerson, Dryden, and Marathon.<sup>67</sup>

Some curious researchers<sup>68</sup> and others have made the point that, as *The Brothers Karamazov* was published in December of 1880,<sup>69</sup> and Marfa was named on January 16<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Morley, Safer, writer. "Marfa, Texas: The Capital of Quirkiness." In *60 Minutes*. CBS. April 14, 2013.

<sup>65</sup> Wilson, Thomas. "Dostoyevsky and the Big Bend." *Journal of Big Bend Studies* 13 (2001): 121-44.

<sup>66</sup> Carroll, H. Bailey. "Texas Collection." *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (1944): 276-303.

<sup>67</sup> Wilson, Thomas. "Dostoyevsky and the Big Bend." *Journal of Big Bend Studies* 13 (2001): 121-44.

<sup>68</sup> As told to me by Cecilia Thompson.

<sup>69</sup> Wilson, Thomas. "Dostoyevsky and the Big Bend." *Journal of Big Bend Studies* 13 (2001): 121-44.

of 1882, it was highly unlikely that this woman would have been reading a translated novel some thirteen months after its original publication.

Still, it is suggested by Wilson<sup>70</sup> that there is sufficient evidence to prove that Strobridge had in fact been reading *The Brothers Karamazov* in Russian, and his research takes us on a path through Russian literature and language in his investigation of this mystery. His thesis argues that, because a nearby Texas town was named Feodora and not Feodor (the important ‘a’ suggesting that the source is Russian (Fedora) and not an American translation (Fedor), which would have dropped the ‘a’), the sourcing text would have also been in Russian.

Ultimately, though, it is Galveston’s *Daily News* of December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1882 that clarifies the naming of Marfa:

The fort (Fort Davis) is twenty-two miles north of the Southern Pacific Railroad. The nearest station is at Marfa, so named after one of the characters in the play of Michael Strogoff, and two or three other stations derive their names from Jules Verne’s story.<sup>71</sup>

And so we may conclude that Marfa was in fact named for a character in Jules Verne’s *Michael Strogoff* and not Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. Surely, future writing of Marfa will make mention of both.

What is important about this mystery is that, for those who believe Strobridge was reading her novel in Russian, Marfa’s position in history as a cultural center has been in place well before Donald Judd or any later artists, regardless of which book the name

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> *The Daily News (Galveston)*. December 17, 1882. Accessed July 2, 2013.  
[Http://galveston.newspaperarchive.com/](http://galveston.newspaperarchive.com/).



Marfa was taken from. In fact, in 1925, the Davis Mountain Federation of Women's Clubs attempted to create a Southwestern Art Center in the Davis Mountains,<sup>72</sup> which are just north of Marfa, and from 1921 to 1950 there was a highly regarded art department at Sul Ross University (referred to as "The Lost Colony") that supported and educated regional painters.<sup>73</sup> The people of Marfa, it has been suggested,<sup>74</sup> have always been interested in the arts, as demonstrated by the former venues and organizations that promoted theater, the opera, dancing, etc. To speak of Marfa as an arts mecca, then, is not to reference only Donald Judd, but instead the town's entire history, spanning back to its prominent ranching days. Judd may prompt one to take the direct leap - but nevertheless it is interesting to look back upon the long influence of the arts in Marfa.<sup>75</sup>

### **The Military to Marfa**

In 1910, a group of Texas Rangers was moved from Ysleta, Texas (now a part of El Paso) to Marfa<sup>76</sup> due to the increasing conflict that would become the Mexican Revolution.<sup>77</sup> The following year the Third Cavalry arrived.<sup>78</sup> From this time until the

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<sup>72</sup> Thompson, Cecilia. *History of Marfa and Presidio County, Texas, 1535-1946*. Austin, TX: Nortex, 1985.

<sup>73</sup> Bones, Mary. "The Lost Colony: Texas Regionalist Paintings." *Cenzino* (Alpine, Texas), Winter 2011.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Cecilia Thompson.

<sup>75</sup> And I haven't even touched upon Hispanic art, which is my own fault as a non-expert. Again, the forthcoming dissertation by Josh T. Franco at Binghamton University will expand on Hispanic culture and art in west Texas.

<sup>76</sup> Thompson, Cecilia. *History of Marfa and Presidio County, Texas, 1535-1946*. Austin, TX: Nortex, 1985.

<sup>77</sup> I will not attempt to summarize the Mexican Revolution but instead note that its history is as complex and controversial as any war or conflict. There are myriad books on the subject, including but not limited to: McLynn, Frank. *Villa and Zapata: A History of the Mexican Revolution*. New York: Carroll & Graf, 2001; Easterling, Stuart. *The Mexican Revolution: A Short History, 1910-1920*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket, 2012; Wasserman, Mark. *The Mexican Revolution: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2012; Brenner, Anita, and George Ross Leighton. *The Wind That Swept Mexico; the History of the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1942*. Austin: University of Texas, 1971; Azuela, Mariano. *The Underdogs, a Novel of the Mexican Revolution*. [New York]: New American Library, 1963.

<sup>78</sup> Taylor, Lonn. "Fort D.A. Russell, Marfa." Lecture, The Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas, May 1, 2011.

conclusion of World War II, this military focus would shape Marfa's history; Marfa's identity would expand to include a military component to its historic ranching roots.

The Mexican Revolution would soon bring the creation of Camp Marfa in 1911. It is of interest to know that during this conflict, many Mexicans seeking refuge would travel from Ojinaga, in Chihuahua, across the border to Presidio, Texas – today about an hour's drive from Marfa. Throughout Marfa's history and especially during this conflict, there would be an influx of Mexicans who would ultimately have a great impact on the area's identity and culture, and their assimilation into American life would not be without discrimination or conflict.<sup>79</sup> To walk through Marfa's main drag, to see the names on buildings is to see the history of Marfa, but it is an Anglo male history. Despite the hard work of the Mexican-American men and women that was essential to the area's development, theirs is a history arguably lost – or at least, unattended to – in favor of the hipness (read: white, affluent, art-ness) that is present-day Marfa. To skim through the small phone book, however, or to walk through the still-segregated cemetery, and even to look at simple Census numbers, is to see a dominant Mexican-American presence in Marfa and its environs.<sup>80</sup>

Camp Marfa was created in 1911 as a semi-permanent base for U.S. Cavalry troops, and in its early stages the men camped in tents until permanent barracks could be built. This was also the year that the first airplane landed in Marfa. Originally landing on the campgrounds – more or less where the present-day golf course is – airplanes landing

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<sup>79</sup> See Raun, Gerald G. "Seventeen Days in November: The Lynching of Antonio Rodriguez and American-Mexican Relations, 3-19, 1910." *Journal of Big Bend Studies* VII (1995); Kerr, Marianne Bachman. "Corridos: Reflections in Acculturation Along the Border." *Journal of Big Bend Studies* VII (1995); Wright, Paul. "A Tumultuous Decade: Changed in the Mexican-Origin Population of the Big Bend, 1910-1920." *Journal of Big Bend Studies* X (1998).

<sup>80</sup> A forthcoming dissertation on Marfa by Josh T. Franco (PhD Art History, Binghamton University) will specifically explore the discrepancies between White and Hispanic identities, involving but not limited to the type of pilgrimages undertaken by visitors to Marfa.

at Royce Flying Field would prove essential for efficient patrolling of the border. Four hangars at this site would later be transferred to town in the 1930s; Donald Judd would later purchase and occupy three of the hangars in the 1970s, and the fourth would become the Holiday Inn Capri, now an events space called The Capri.

Both U.S. Cavalry troops and Texas Rangers patrolled the area for the next few years while various conflicts occurred along the border. Until officially renamed Fort D.A. Russell in 1930, the camp was known as Camp Albert, Camp Marfa and Camp U.S. Troops, Marfa, Texas.<sup>81</sup> In addition to the Mexican Revolution, the United States' entrance into World War I in 1917 also contributed to the growth of Camp Marfa. In 1918, the U.S. government officially leased 420 acres for the more permanent creation and maintenance of Camp Marfa. This land was leased from W.G. Young of Marfa, and his peers encouraged his cooperation and this transformation of land.<sup>82</sup>

In 1927, the U.S. government purchased Young's land outright and Camp Marfa's future as a permanent base was, for the time being, secured. In 1930, Camp Marfa was officially renamed Fort D.A. Russell.<sup>83</sup> It was at the time of the name change that the fort officially became a permanent post.

The growing military economy, in conjunction with a booming cattle industry, provided a stable and growing base for Marfa's prosperity during this time. Although there were certainly those who did not appreciate the associated drinking, rowdiness, and "lewd women" that came with the military men in such numbers, the town's citizens generally agreed that a permanent military presence was good for the town's economy, as

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<sup>81</sup> Thompson, Cecilia. *History of Marfa and Presidio County, Texas, 1535-1946*. Austin, TX: Nortex, 1985.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Fort D.A. Russell in Wyoming was renamed to honor the late Senator of Wyoming, Francis E. Warren, and so the name Russell was transferred to Camp Marfa. David Allen Russell was a Civil War general killed in the Battle of Opequon in 1864.

<sup>83</sup> Source: <http://www.warren.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=4464>

evidenced by the various articles in *The Big Bend Sentinel* throughout the fort's existence.<sup>84</sup> (*The Big Bend Sentinel*, at present still Marfa's weekly source of news, was founded in 1926 and for the time being served as welcome competition to *The New Era*.)<sup>85</sup>

Marfans knew that a military presence in town would provide an economic advantage, and they happily welcomed the soldiers. Although its occupancy would fluctuate to align with the demands of the conflict on the border, Camp Marfa kept a steady presence during peaceful times as well. In 1924, the Immigration Act made official the Marfa Sector, which made way for the modern U.S. Customs and Border Protection. In 2011, the Marfa Sector changed its name to the Big Bend Sector.

The Big Bend Sector is the largest station of the Border Patrol, spanning 135,000 square miles and 510 border miles,<sup>86</sup> and its headquarters remains in Marfa, although from 1935-1949 it was headquartered in next-door Alpine. (The temporary move was due to the re-instatement of Fort D.A. Russell during World War II, which created a housing shortage in Marfa.) Today the Border Patrol employs about 700 agents in the Big Bend Sector, with about 75 of those agents working in and around Marfa. The headquarters also employs about 50 civilian employees and 20 officers, and half of all its employees are of Hispanic descent.<sup>87</sup>

In 1931, the War Department recommended the abandonment of Fort D.A. Russell, but because of the nature of bureaucratic military channels, a decision had yet to

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<sup>84</sup> Various articles giving attention and praise to Camp Marfa throughout the 1930s and the Marfa Army Airfield in the 1940s, until both were permanently closed in 1946.

<sup>85</sup> *The New Era* would consolidate into *The Big Bend Sentinel* in 1928.

<sup>86</sup> Source:

[http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/border\\_security/border\\_patrol/border\\_patrol\\_sectors/marfa\\_sector\\_tx/marfa\\_general.xml](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/border_security/border_patrol/border_patrol_sectors/marfa_sector_tx/marfa_general.xml)

<sup>87</sup> Interview with William Brooks, U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

be formally made by 1932, and was eventually postponed to 1933. The long-standing Cavalry troop would eventually be transferred to Fort Knox, Kentucky, and become motorized.<sup>88</sup> In 1935, the fort was reopened, essentially saved by its reconsideration as a strategic location for protection of the border. WPA funding continued to allow for the improvement and addition of new buildings.

Marfa was centrally located within the Big Bend region, and with the development of the highway system<sup>89</sup> easier access to Presidio to the south, Alpine to the east, and El Paso to the west was gained. The cattle, wool, mohair and cotton industries did well during the middle of the twentieth century. The Shafter mine closed in 1930, later would reopen, close again, and then remain closed from 1942 until 2012; at present they are mining once again.<sup>90</sup>

In 1930, the Hotel Paisano opened in Marfa in anticipation of an oil boom that never came. That being said, having access to housing in town became an essential component of social life, as most ranchers lived far from the town center for most of the year. It was usually when children became of school age that a family might move into town, while others would live part time at the ranch and part time in town. Hotels served as a social center for residents while downtown, and the Hotel Paisano was no exception.

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<sup>88</sup> The Claus Oldenburg and Coosje vatruggen piece at the Chinati Foundation, *Monument to the Last Horse*, is a memorial to the history of one ill-fated horse, Old Louie, who was too old to be transferred to another post when the horses were redistributed. As the story goes, Old Louie was draped in black, killed (one can only assume quickly and painlessly) and buried on the grounds. The *Monument* is an oversized horseshoe with its U turned downward and stands between two bunkers at Chinati. At the time of the artist's *in-residence* at Chinati in 1987, there were many relics from the Fort's hey-day scattered on the property, and it is these nails and horseshoes that inspired the artists.

<sup>89</sup> First with the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1921 and then with the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956. See McNichol, Dan. *The Roads That Built America: The Incredible Story of the U.S. Interstate System*. New York: Sterling Pub., 2006 and Lewis, Tom. *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life*. New York, NY: Viking, 1997.

<sup>90</sup> See Burgess, Jack W., PE. *Technical Report on the Shafter Feasibility Study: Presidio County, Texas, USA*. Technical paper. Vancouver, B.C.: Aurcana Corporation, 2011; Halpern, Alberto Thomas. "Shafter Silver Now Being Mined." *The Big Bend Sentinel*(Marfa, Texas), June 7, 2012; Graczyk, Michael. "Texas Silver Mine Gets New Life after 1942 Closure." *Associated Press*, March 19, 2011.

It would eventually fall into disrepair until 2001, when investors purchased the hotel at auction on the courthouse lawn for \$185,000, (which was what the back-taxes amounted to).<sup>91</sup> Slowly, the hotel was renovated it to its original charm and is now on the National Register of Historic Places, one of four sites in Marfa.<sup>92</sup> The hotel's outdoor courtyard is today a gathering point for locals and tourists, and the lobby's leather seating and darkly stained wood pair well with the large buffalo head mounted across from the front desk.

Along with the reopening of Fort D.A. Russell, 1935 saw the Senate pass a bill for the creation of a national park (Big Bend), a contributing factor to the tourism in the greater area.<sup>93</sup> Other areas of attraction outside of Marfa are the McDonald Observatory in the Davis Mountains, built in 1939, and Sul Ross University in Alpine, established in 1917. These places attract different types of visitors. Because of the military presence in Marfa and the surrounding counties, a USO building was erected during World War I.

The USO building was built between 1941 and 1942, and still stands today in Marfa, serving as the Marfa Visitor Center. While there have been improvements to the exterior walls and the lobby, the grand central space holds much nostalgia. In the 1970s, a former soldier had the idea of posting photos of all the military soldiers from the Marfa area on the walls of the large dance hall. The result is a series of grids with black and white 8x10 photographs of soldiers spanning the entire life of the military in west Texas

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<sup>91</sup> Butcher, Sterry. "Fort Davis Couple Buys Historic El Paisano Hotel." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa, Texas), March 8, 2001.

<sup>92</sup> The other three sites are the Presidio County Courthouse, Building 98 at Fort D.A. Russell and the greater Fort D.A. Russell historic district.

<sup>93</sup> For more information on Big Bend, see: Jameson, John R. *The Story of Big Bend National Park*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996; Maxwell, Ross A. *The Big Bend of the Rio Grande; a Guide to the Rocks, Landscape, Geologic History, and Settlers of the Area of Big Bend National Park*. Austin: University of Texas, 1968; Baumgardner, Neel Gregory. "Bordering North America: Constructing Wilderness Along the Periphery of Canada, Mexico, and the United States." Diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2013.

(Figure 2.5). The chandelier is a replacement – the original one had nearly disintegrated – and an elegant and grand centerpiece to the room.

While the USO building was being constructed, the War Department conducted surveys and research to determine if and where an airport could be built for the purposes of training pilots. In 1942, the Marfa Army Airfield was built and airplanes started arriving towards the end of the year. That the railroad ran through Marfa contributed to the decision to build an airfield there. When complete, the airfield covered 2,750 acres with nearly 250 buildings and six runways, and an additional six auxiliary runways in the surrounding area (Figure 2.6). It is a remarkable feat that the United States was able to build its World War II training airfields as quickly as it did, all over the country, but no more remarkable than the airfields' almost-instantaneous closures once they were considered surplus.

The combination of men from Fort D.A. Russell and the Marfa Army Airfield would balloon the population of Marfa over the World War II years, reaching an apex of 5,000 people (Figure 1.3), and servicemen and locals interacted frequently through sports, dinners, dances, and on the streets of town.<sup>94</sup> Overall, the people of Marfa welcomed the young men into their lives and acted as a support system while the men were far from home. In 1943, German POWs arrived to Fort. D.A. Russell, which would serve as a POW camp until the end of the war. Mostly, the Germans were well behaved, and later interviews reveal that most rather enjoyed their time in Marfa<sup>95</sup> – with the

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<sup>94</sup> As evidenced by *Big Bend Sentinel* articles during this period. There were many marriages between locals and military men, but it is hard to estimate exactly how many.

<sup>95</sup> Kramer, A. "When the "Afrika Korps" Came to Texas." *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (1977): 247-82.

exception of one failed escape attempt<sup>96</sup> – and they mainly spent their time marching around town and maintaining the fort's property.

The flying school at the Marfa Army Airfield prospered during these war years and the location of the operation was ideal. Marfa was and remains an ideal location for flying, tucked into the Marfa Plateau between all those mountains. Many citizens of the Big Bend would enlist and train, some right in Marfa. There were regular air casualties, but in total the base would train about 8,000 pilots. Like most American towns during World War II, the general social and economic focus was on supporting the war, and all lives were affected. Although the massive air base was in many respects a self-contained small town, it was not uncommon for base dwellers to travel into town for shopping and socializing.<sup>97</sup> This resulted in many marriages to local girls, but a precise estimate is unknown.

In 1945, it was recommended that both the Marfa Army Airfield and Fort D.A. Russell go into inactive status; the airbase would close the following year. Fort D.A. Russell would see the last of its German POWs depart in 1945, and its inactive status was never again changed. In 1949, the land was sold off to private ownership. The airfield was host to the route of Trans-Texas Airways during 1948-1960<sup>98</sup> and its runways were operational until about the early 1980s.<sup>99</sup> The boom of the war years was bittersweet, for with the conclusion of the war came the closure of many bases, and the closing of the Marfa Army Airfield and Fort D.A. Russell would negatively affect Marfa's economy.

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<sup>96</sup> Taylor, Lonn. "Fort D.A. Russell, Marfa." Lecture, The Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas, May 1, 2011.

<sup>97</sup> Thompson, Cecilia. *History of Marfa and Presidio County, Texas, 1535-1946*. Austin, TX: Nortex, 1985, 2011. Again, based on articles in the *The Big Bend Sentinel* during these war years, it is evident that locals embraced the military.

<sup>98</sup> Anthony, Allen. *Little Airlines in the Big Bend*. Fort Davis, TX: River Microstudies, 1999.

<sup>99</sup> As told to me by local pilot and Marfa resident Burt Compton.



The auxiliary fields were no longer needed, and piece-by-piece, the base was dismantled and sold or transferred. Some buildings ended up at Sul Ross University. Today the airfield is a hidden landscape, but its runways and flight lines remain imprinted on the earth (Figure 2.7). A graduate architecture studio at Princeton recently proposed ways to reuse and repurpose the space of the airfield,<sup>100</sup> and there was even an attempt to transform the former runways into a racetrack.<sup>101</sup> Marfa's economy divorced from war would again prosper by way of the artist Donald Judd's impact, but that would not be for many years.

## **Drought and Recovery**

Life in Marfa continued without major disruption until 1950. Between 1950 and 1957, Texas experienced a severe drought that absolutely devastated the ranching industry.<sup>102</sup> While ranchers were used to having good and bad years as measured by wetness and dryness, this drought simply "didn't break." The grasses of west Texas are strong, tough grasses – the general lack of water has made them so – but not having the necessary amounts of rain forced ranchers to sell off their cattle or buy feed to maintain them. As one rancher described a drought, "You have to cut your cows because you don't have enough to feed them. The revenue is cut, but the needs are constant, so you just

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<sup>100</sup> For more information, see <http://archinect.com/people/project/52903780/maaf/54037381>

<sup>101</sup> Butcher, Sterry. "Motorcar Raceway Speeding toward Marfa Army Airfield?" *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa), February 10, 2011.

<sup>102</sup> The 1950s drought was as bad as the 1930s drought, or Dust Bowl years, and although culturally the Dust Bowl is most often thought of as being contained in the Great Plains, its affects were seen all over the United States, including west Texas. In fact, one of the FSA photographers, Russell Lee, photographed the Walking X Ranch near Marfa in 1939. See: Schwabe, Kurt. *Drought in Arid and Semi-arid Regions: A Multi-disciplinary and Cross-country Perspective*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2013; Glantz, Michael H. *Drought Follows the Plow: Cultivating Marginal Areas*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.

hope for a better day.”<sup>103</sup> Another said, “There’s not much to say about a drought. You look to the sky and pray for rain.”

Environmental determinism has long been out of vogue to geographers. The belief that the environment is the conduit to creating culture has been critiqued as too simplistic to account for the diversity of culture and its relationship to the environment.<sup>104</sup> However, I wonder how much the culture of the west Texas rancher has been determined by his environment. There is a certain resolve that people have had in Marfa to keep things going. The ranching industry has changed because of modernization and technology, from better equipment to advanced feed, but the stamina and strength of the rancher is a constant. Perhaps it is in this harsher landscape that a more pared-down relationship between humans and the environment can be seen. By living in such a harsh landscape, Marfans are perhaps closer to the landscape than residents of larger towns and cities.

The *idea* of the rancher is alive in Marfa – it is this ideology, paired with an artsy hipness, that has created what I argue to be a Marfa style – but perhaps it is at present only an idea and no longer a reality, an actual way of life. Although land has been sold throughout the years, not all new (absentee) owners are farming the land. Perhaps it is best to allow the landscape of the west Texas desert time to recuperate. The landscape of Marfa is “its greatest treasure”<sup>105</sup> and so perhaps it is time to reconsider ranching.

The rain finally came in 1957, enough to officially end the drought and bring renewed hope to the ranchers. However, one can see that Marfa was already affected; enough that it lost some of its population. In 1950, the population of Marfa had decreased

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with Chip Love.

<sup>104</sup> See Hubbard, Phil. "A Brief History of Geographic Thought." *Thinking Geographically*. London: Continuum, 2002. 22-56.

<sup>105</sup> From correspondence from the former Director of the Chinati Foundation, Marianne Stockebrand, to *The Big Bend Sentinel* in reaction to the newly installed (and subsequently ordered down) *Playboy Marfa*. Source: <http://bigbendnow.com/2013/06/correspondence-83/>

to 3,603 from 5,000 in 1940. In essence, stores had closed and folks had already moved elsewhere in search of work. There was one surge of activity during this time of drought that would greatly affect Marfa, and its impact is still seen today. In 1955, George Stevens came to Marfa to film *Giant*, which will be discussed further in Chapter Five. The biggest change had yet to come to Marfa, however, which was the artist Donald Judd's arrival. First renting a home in 1971, he maintained a presence in Marfa until his sudden death in 1994. Judd's transformation of Marfa would forever alter its course in history -- and he will be further discussed in Chapter Four.

## **Marfa and the Border**

On May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1997, a young boy who had just turned 18 was tending to his family's goats in Redford, TX – a tiny border town about 90 minutes from Marfa and 30 from Presidio – when he was shot and killed by a four-member unit of the Marines that was training in the area and mistook him for a drug runner. This young man was the first American to be killed on native soil by U.S. military forces since the 1970 Kent State shootings.<sup>106</sup>

The teenager, Esequiel Hernandez, Jr., was armed with a .22 rifle, not an uncommon accessory for a rancher to carry. The four Marines were from Joint Task Force Six, a unit that assists state and local law enforcement agencies in counter-drug operations.<sup>107</sup> The unit was in west Texas working with the Border Patrol on a joint drug trafficking venture, but the members were not properly trained about the customs and habits of the residents (such as the normalcy of being armed when goat herding in west

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<sup>106</sup> Paulsen, M. (1998, December 25). Fatal Error: The Pentagon's War on Drugs Takes a Toll on the Innocent. *Austin Chronicle*.

<sup>107</sup> Gwynne, S. (1997, August). Border Skirmish. *Time*, 40.

Texas). Further, the Redford community had not been notified that Marines would be armed and training in the area. Combined, this lack of education and information is said to have caused the tragedy, but during the investigation conflicting reports placed blame on either party. Some interviewees placed blame on the teenager for having fired shots in the direction of the Marines, while others maintained that the teenager had never seen or fired at anyone.<sup>108</sup> The complications that arose from these conflicting reports brought a lot of political attention to the Border Patrol and its policies, and this killing started a nationwide discussion about the border that is ongoing. Marfa's proximity to the border begs this question: Can the geography of Marfa and the border define its people?

Marfa is not a border town in the strictest sense of the term,<sup>109</sup> but its location one hour from the border places it within the framework of Borderland culture, politics and economy, and the combination of these qualities and its geography is often referred to as "the Border." This has historically affected the development of its own people and culture. The Border is a fascinating place because it is almost its own country, a blend of both Mexico and the United States. The increase in Border Patrol agents and activity in recent years have made the area particularly militarized, and some have described the border as a "scene of an ongoing economic conquest."<sup>110</sup> The Redford killing is an example of the devastating impacts of this militarization.

The Big Bend Sector (formally the Marfa Sector) of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection is in particular an entirely different place when compared to other areas along the border to Mexico. It is the largest, and the landscape is the most rugged. "This

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<sup>108</sup> Butcher, S. (2002, May 16). After 5 years, Redford teen's killing still troubles participants in case. *The Big Bend Sentinel*, p. 1,7.

<sup>109</sup> Border towns are traditionally located right at the border as opposed to an hour from it, like Marfa. Presidio, TX and Ojinaja, Chihuahua; San Diego, CA and Tijuana, Baja California; Douglas, AZ and Agua Prieta, Sonora are all opposing U.S./Mexican border towns.

<sup>110</sup> Hall, D. K. (1988). *The border: Life on the line*. New York: Abbeville Press.

country is desolate, and it's full of old-time Texans, and on both sides of the river people are real independent.”<sup>111</sup> For anyone trying to illegally cross into the United States from Mexico, it is the most challenging area to cross. The surrounding mountains all create barriers that are nearly impossible to travel through, and along with that are the sun and the heat to battle, even in the best conditions. Finding yourself without water or food is death. The Border Patrol has seen a rise in both drug trafficking and illegal crossings,<sup>112</sup> which has contributed to the growth of the Big Bend Sector's personnel. Despite this growth, only 10 percent of the Big Bend Sector remains in “operational control” due to the forbidding landscape.<sup>113</sup> In essence, there is a lot of landscape out there to contend with, and not for lack of trying, both the Border Patrol and the inhabitants of west Texas are at its mercy.

Periodically, massive marijuana caches will be found at the highway checkpoint between Presidio and Marfa, and this keeps the Border Patrol in the area on constant alert in the area. This contributes to the identity of Marfa, as its residents must live in conjunction with an organization that is inherently suspicious. The Border Patrol agents stretch their jurisdiction for hundreds of miles along the Big Bend Sector territory, and this, along with the uptick in crime, has necessitated a steady increase in agents. Between 1993 and 2012, the agent staffing increased from 3,444 to 18,546 in the Southwest sectors, of which the Big Bend Sector is a part.<sup>114</sup> Back in the 1990s, however, the Border

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<sup>111</sup> Quoting U.S. Border Patrol Agent Mike Harrison, Hall, D. K. (1988). *The border: Life on the line*. New York: Abbeville Press.

<sup>112</sup> For example, in 1991 there were 8957 illegals captured; in 1992 that rose to 11,690; and in 1993 that rose to 15,920.

<sup>113</sup> Editorial. "Twisting the Truth on the Mexican Border." *The Washington Post*, May 14, 2011.

<sup>114</sup> The Southwest Sector is composed of Big Bend (Marfa), Del Rio, El Centro, El Paso, Laredo, Rio Grande Valley (McAllen), San Diego, Tucson, Yuma, and as of FY 2010, the Special Operations Group. For comparison, the Coastal Border Sectors increased from 183 to 224 and the Northern Border Sectors increased from 310 to 2,206 in the same time period.

Patrol simply didn't have sufficient manpower, which is how the Marines became involved via Joint Task Force Six. After the Redford killing, policy changed, and although the military has returned in recent years to continue to assist the Border Patrol, they do so unarmed. As for the Marine who shot and killed Esequiel, he was acquitted of charges of murder.

It is this type of event that causes one to think about Marfa's placement near the border, and what that has meant for its residents. Not only does the community grapple with the Border Patrol's itinerary of combating drugs and illegal immigration, it also must deal with the challenges of its growing tourism economy against the backdrop of its history and demographics. Marfa's population is currently 69% Hispanic and has more or less always been this way.<sup>115</sup> How is the place of Marfa created for these residents? Is it that much different than the place of Marfa for its tourists and art community? Finally, does a largely Hispanic population contribute to any type of discrimination in Marfa?

Quantifying discrimination can be a challenge: how do we measure what so often goes unsaid? *The Other Side of the Tracks*<sup>116</sup> is a native's account of growing up in Marfa, living south of the railroad tracks and defiantly walking into Marfa Elementary to enroll there instead of the Blackwell School, which until its 1965 closing was a segregated school for Hispanic students. Cano's thoughtful portrayal of Marfa during the 1950s is evidence to a divided town, but it is also a town that is changing. He and his friends make Varsity football while the white kids do not, and he and his friends have

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<sup>115</sup> The 2010 Census for Marfa shows 69% Hispanic; the 2000 Census shows 70% Hispanic; the 1990 Census shows 68% Hispanic. Information in previous years does not show Hispanic origin, however in 1980, 77% of the population of the entire Presidio County is Hispanic. Previous Census data did not record demographic data. However, an interview with the former principal and then super-intendant of the Marfa Independent School District from 1964-1992 revealed that in 1965, the school demographics were roughly 70% Hispanic, which suggests a similar overall demographic to Marfa. Another native said that during her high school years in the 1950s classes were largely Hispanic.

<sup>116</sup> Cano, T. (2001). *The Other Side of the Tracks*. Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing.

plenty of adventures with the “forbidden” white girls of their age, who themselves see past race but who must go against their parents’ disapproval. In many of the parental characters there is a sadness in their admonition: discrimination is wrong, they know, but it is the way of life, and the older generations aren’t quite ready to let it go.

When the Blackwell School closed in January of 1965,<sup>117</sup> the Marfa Elementary absorbed its students. Some Hispanic residents still remember having to carry their desks from their old school to their new one, which they took as evidence of an unwelcoming community.<sup>118</sup> Even before Blackwell’s closure, Hispanic students there were not allowed to speak Spanish at school.<sup>119</sup> It would take a lifetime for some to see the influence of tolerance and change on the small community in Marfa, and it cannot be denied that the community is in some way still divided by race. That Marfa’s current and popular identity is so closely tied to the impact of the artist Donald Judd is not the fault or doing of its Hispanic community, but it does sometimes result in the lack of their voices to the story. Some interviewees make mention of discrimination, and most older residents will say that it has gotten much better throughout their lifetime, but there is vague evidence of discrimination of Hispanics by whites, and the media seem eager to speak of

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<sup>117</sup> Although there was a special school supplement to the January 21<sup>st</sup> edition of *The Big Bend Sentinel*, the writing focused on the dedication of the new Marfa Elementary School as well as a profile of Jesse Blackwell, the teacher for whom the Blackwell School was renamed to in 1942. There was no critical discussion of what it meant at the time to integrate two previously segregated schools into one.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Marfa residents and former Blackwell School students. However, this oft referred to example of discrimination may have more to do with memory than fact. In an interview with the 1964 principal of Marfa Elementary, this story was refuted as being inaccurate. The principal detailed that it was a hectic day for sure, but that various custodians and older children were helping out the younger ones. His recollection of the integration of the two schools centered on the receptiveness of teachers and students.

<sup>119</sup> They even had an elaborate “burial” ceremony in 1954 wherein they symbolically “buried” their native language, referring to it as “Mr. Spanish.” From interview with former students, but also see Blackburn, Mary Walling. “A Politics of Tears: The Museum of Useless Efforts, Marfa, TX.” *Afterall*, May 11, 2008. Accessed December 2, 2013.

a divided town in order to write a better story. “Friction between Marfa’s communities is minimal,” says one resident.<sup>120</sup>

What is most telling in Marfa, however, is the fact that the cemetery remains segregated by a fence, dividing white from Hispanic. As such, for all that locals can say about the feeling of kumbaya in Marfa, there remains an elephant in the room: the damn fence. There has been no discussion about the fence in the newspaper or through a public forum, although the Merced Cemetery – the Hispanic side – did receive the gift of an additional acre of land from a white rancher, whose family is one of the oldest in Marfa. This allowed for native Hispanics to continue to be buried in Marfa (as their cemetery was full as of 2008), but it doesn’t solve the problem of the fence. One native, Hispanic man relayed to me this sentiment from a native, white rancher: “As long as I am alive, that fence will not be taken down.” The person who said this is 85, so Marfans may not have to wait too much longer, but it would mean so much more to take the fence down while this native, so passionately against taking down the fence, is still alive.

Because Marfa is a largely Hispanic population it may be reasonable to think that this culture would be at the forefront of Marfa’s identity instead of an art one. In fact, many businesses are owned by Hispanics and there is a healthy representation on the city council. Discrimination has not been erased but it has waned. One native Marfan wrote of discrimination: “I believe there are still some whites in Marfa that have not gotten the word that this is the year 2001 not 1901.”<sup>121</sup> Through various interviews, I have heard slight suggestions of discrimination, but it’s actually a discrimination of whites by Hispanics. One retired educator who also coached high school tennis was accused of discrimination because he only coached white students. However, as he explained to me,

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<sup>120</sup> Mari, Francesca. "The Economics of Marfa." *The Art Newspaper*, November 2013, Issue 251.

<sup>121</sup> Garcia, M. (2001, August 2). Letter to the editor. *The Big Bend Sentinel*.



he couldn't force the Hispanic kids to play tennis if they didn't want to play. More than a racial division, a lot of it comes down to larger factors: class, education, and interest. We don't surround ourselves with other people of our race because we share that trait. We surround ourselves with people that have the same interests, as varied as that can mean, and some people might read that as discrimination.

For instance, one day I stepped into St. Mary's Catholic Church to attend the 10 AM mass, the first time I have done so in 17 years. There was a fair amount of people there, and as it turned out it was the First Communion for some of the church's younger members. The little girls were adorable in their white dresses and the young boys looked austere in their slacks and crisp, white shirts. Of immediate note was that all of these children and the rest of the attendance were Hispanic,<sup>122</sup> although there were a handful of white patrons towards the front. This was a case of a community gathering for religion, not race, and so the question of discrimination seems to dissolve. It was my decision to join this community on this Sunday morning, and I did not feel excluded. However, as a white Atheist, I was very much an outsider to this largely Hispanic, Catholic community.

Being inclusive is what most of the structured events that take place in Marfa are all about. The foundations in Marfa constantly create opportunities for local residents to partake in events. Ballroom Marfa holds a free DJ camp each summer, for example, and the Chinati Foundation regularly offers free art classes, nature walks, and an annual Community Day to partner with and celebrate their neighbors in Marfa. In 2012 and again in 2013, the Blackwell School Alliance partnered with the Chinati Foundation to host the annual celebration of Día de los Muertos. These types of events are geared toward all members of Marfa, not just the art-inclined ones.

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<sup>122</sup> It is estimated that 70% of adult Hispanics are Catholic, from: Perl, Paul, Jennifer Z. Greely, and Mark M. Gray. "What Proportion of Adult Hispanics are Catholic? A review of Survey Data and Methodology." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45.3 (2006): 419-436.

Marfa is a part of the border culture because of its geography, and this in turn has impacted the culture of its residents. Over time, the culture of Marfa becomes more tied to its territory, and it is in this way that the place of Marfa is equally dependent on both geography and also its people and culture. Through the work of its residents, foundations and visitors, Marfa can be protected while still constantly undergoing change, or progress. Marfa's geography isn't going to change, and as such the Border Patrol will continue to have a presence there. Marfa's own military history, however, shows this to be not out of the ordinary for its residents. Its racial makeup, however, places Marfa as part of a Border culture: a little bit Mexico, a little bit United States. This aspect of its identity should be celebrated and encouraged.

## **Conclusion**

As evidenced by its history, the landscape of Marfa has undergone many changes and it will continue to do so as it evolves into an arts-focused place of tourism. The native Apache and Comanche tribes were largely nomadic because the terrain of the Chihuahuan Desert is harsh, but they also encountered conflicts with the encroaching Spanish, Mexican and white settlers. The arrival of Spanish colonists prompted the military occupation of the area as the question of land ownership was fought for, and the Mexican population and later white homesteaders have contributed to the identity of Marfa through their occupation and ranching of the land. As the arrival of the railroad allowed for the expansion and success of the ranching industry, continued military occupation allowed for economic growth in Marfa until the end of World War II. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection has seen a large increase in agents through the Big Bend region, allowing for job creation but also a militarization of the ever-contested

border. Marfa's identity as a ranching community is perhaps overly romanticized because Marfa is no longer a ranching town. It is a town near the U.S.-Mexico border, populated largely by Hispanics, and is most notable these days as a place of art and culture. Marfa's complicated, diverse history is important to understanding the changes undergone in the last twenty years, and the more that this history is revered and referenced, the richer that its present identity can become.



Figure 2.1: Map of Chihuahuan Desert, from the NMBGMR<sup>123</sup>

<sup>123</sup> New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources

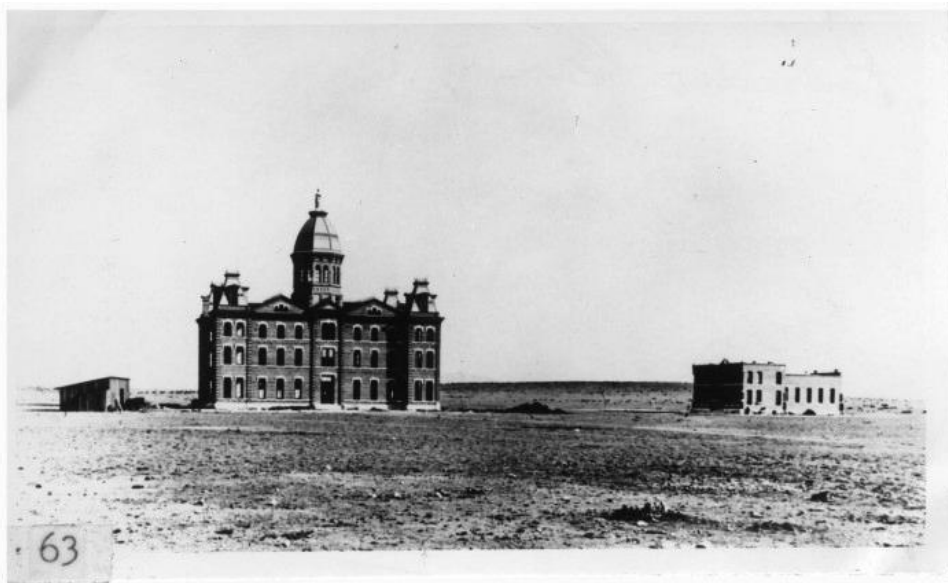


Figure 2.2: 1886 photograph of the Presidio County courthouse, from the University of North Texas Libraries



Figure 2.3: Riata Ranch house from *Giant*, from the Big Bend Quarterly

● Presidio County  
Courthouse



Figure 2.4: Map of downtown Marfa, from a studio tour guide map



Figure 2.5: 2013 interior view of the USO building in Marfa, by author



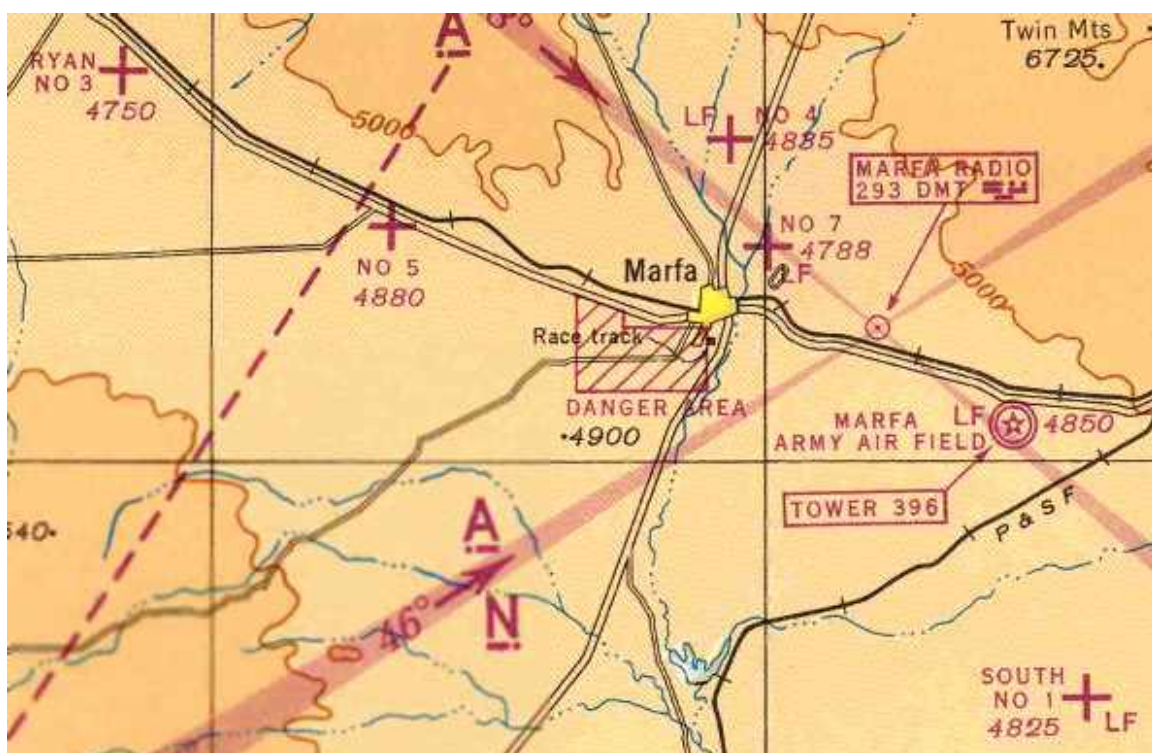


Figure 2.6: 1944 El Paso Sectional Chart indicating the MAAF and surrounding auxiliary fields, from [airfields-freeman.com](http://airfields-freeman.com)





Figure 2.7: 2011 aerial view of the Marfa Army Airfield, by author

## CHAPTER 3: THE LANDSCAPE OF MARFA

Geography is a science of landscape, space, and place, and Marfa can be investigated through these terms. Marfa is a location, or space, and it is also an idea, or place. The landscape of Marfa is the landscape of west Texas, in the Chihuahuan desert. The expansiveness of its geography is one of its most relished characteristics. Throughout this dissertation I speak of the vast landscape of Marfa, and I speak of the qualities that define both the place and *placing* of Marfa. In this chapter I will look into the nuanced differences between landscape, space, and place, thereby allowing a fuller investigation of Marfa's historical and contemporary identity.

### Landscape

Landscape is an intensely visual idea.<sup>124</sup> It is something to be looked at and experienced, and it surrounds us everywhere we go. Landscapes change through the hand of humankind. They also change for us as we physically travel from one to the next, and they change in our minds as we are separated and then reconnected to them. They affect the way we experience place, and as we get to know a landscape, we shift our perception of it; the landscape intensifies.

Following Carl Sauer,<sup>125</sup> landscape is the unit concept in geography. It is where to begin research, exploration, and theory, from the physical descriptions of landscape to the way that the cultural landscape is shaped. Donald Meinig writes that landscape is “an

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<sup>124</sup> Cosgrove, Denis E., and Stephen Daniels. *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of past Environments*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

<sup>125</sup> Sauer, Carl. “The Morphology of Landscape.” John Leighly, ed. *Land and Life: a Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer*. Berkeley: University of California, 1963.

attractive and ambiguous term used by artists, earth scientists, architects, planners, historians, archeologists and geographers.”<sup>126</sup> In this way the landscape is for everyone, despite the fact that we look at landscapes differently. Denis Cosgrove believes that landscape is a misleading concept that on its most basic level “refers to the surface of the earth or part of it.”<sup>127</sup> He adds that landscape contains multiple layers of meaning; landscape is not purely visual, it is a constructed environment, and an environment that is constructed is done so by the hand of power. In summary, landscape is a deceptively simple term that is actually quite substantive, depending on histories and perspectives, as well as intentions. Our landscapes define us, but we also define our landscapes.

People are both influenced by their surrounding landscape and take part in affecting it. If we define culture as a set of values and behavioral patterns that are often shared within a group, we can place culture onto the landscape. In this way the cultural landscape is a product of both the physical and the social world. Expanding from culture, the history of art shows us that landscape has been a popular subject from its beginning. The Paleolithic cave paintings in Lascaux, France, believed to be more than 17,000 years old, are the first landscapes of symbol. They are representations of the artists’ world. Horses, bulls, figures and symbols are depicted on the cave walls while no outlying vegetation or landscape is drawn. The images are remarkable for their impressive sense of shadow and depth. After seeing the caves not long after their 1940 discovery, Pablo Picasso famously remarked, “We have invented nothing.”<sup>128</sup> We are constantly trying to understand and depict our surrounding landscapes, and geographers can play an

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<sup>126</sup> Meinig, Donald. *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.

<sup>127</sup> Cosgrove, Denis E., and Stephen Daniels. *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of past Environments*. Cambridge [England: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

<sup>128</sup> Lichfield, John. "Six Months to save Lascaux." *The Independent* [London] 12 July 2008.

important part in how we view these spaces and interpret their larger cultural meaning. In the west Texas landscape, early rock art gives us the symbols of early landscape and cultural representation.<sup>129</sup> This evidence from early inhabitants reminds us of the depth of the history that surrounds us.

Humanistic geography emerged in the 1970s as a reaction to the geometric determinism of logical positivism and spatial science during the quantitative revolution in geography.<sup>130</sup> Whereas the 1950s and 1960s saw a more mathematical and scientific approach to geography due in part to World War II and the practical need for geographers, the later generations of geographers didn't want to be associated with such hard science. There was an expanding field of social science that was going in more abstract directions. Geography was also about culture, experience, and perspective, and it was important to develop a new kind of geography that would help people better understand their complex social relationships with the environment. Human geographers emphasize meaning in this way. To understand the landscape of Marfa, it is important to understand all components, both physical and cultural, as they complement each other to provide a complete portrait of the space.

Following Cosgrove, we can understand the landscape from two perspectives, visually and perceptively. First, the landscape is a series of visual expressions of material culture.<sup>131</sup> Landscapes are then put into a larger social framework in order to understand various processes and systems. In this way the complex environment can be ordered and explained in relation to individual cultural factors that may be different or similar across borders. The artist Ed Ruscha's early photographic work of parking lots is an example of

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<sup>129</sup> Powers, Andrea. "The Psychology of Rock Art." *Journal of Big Bend Studies* XX (2008).

<sup>130</sup> Gaile, Gary L., and Cort J. Willmott. *Geography in America at the Dawn of the 21st Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

understanding and ordering systems, which then allows us to look at ourselves from a neutral perspective. As with Donald Judd's repetitive forms at the Chinati Foundation, there is something very powerful about systematic visual systems, be they structural, photographic, or other. In seeing a space or an object over and over, we are able to move past superficial levels of structure or organization to reveal nuanced differences.

Second, landscape is something to be perceived and responded to. Psychology and memory are tools that differ from person to person. In this way, no two persons see the same landscape, and no two social groups make precisely the same evaluation of the environment.<sup>132</sup> Thus, the environment is a consistently fluid landscape, adjusting to the individual based on his or her memory, history, and experience. The ranchers, Hispanics, and artists of Marfa perceive and experience their landscape differently.

The work of Yi-Fu Tuan<sup>133</sup> has dealt with the importance of experience and how this affects our understanding of place and space. Kenneth Foote's research on the landscapes of violence and war explores geographically what Sally Mann's photographs do visually. Mann's photographs of Civil War battlefields, using vintage techniques, speak to what Foote is exploring: is it possible to witness the sadness and death of history by experiencing these physical landscapes?<sup>134</sup> Can we experience the history of Marfa by looking at, walking through and living in its landscape?

Looking at landscape is a learned process; to see something is both to observe is and to grasp it intellectually.<sup>135</sup> This looking, or seeing, is also affected by what we seek

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<sup>132</sup> Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> See Foote's *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy* and Mann's *Deep South* and *What Remains*. The geographer and photographer's work is an excellent way to investigate a similar topic using interdisciplinary methods.

<sup>135</sup> Cosgrove, Denis E. *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1998.

to uncover. Landscape is a term that is broad because we all have a general sense of what it means, and yet very specific because it is constantly changing due to the interaction with and interest of the humans that use it. We take the term for granted, because we can all see the landscape, but we cannot see the landscape in its entirety until we have trained our eyes and our minds to notice that which is unwritten on the landscape. The history of the Marfa area far predates its founding fathers, but there are few obvious markers of this history.

John K. Wright<sup>136</sup> tells us that many types of geographical research cannot be pursued along strictly scientific lines; that intuitive, visual, imaginations are also an equally valid and necessary way to study landscape. His proposal is in line with my investigation of Marfa, because Marfa is an intensely visual landscape. What I mean by this is that both its physical geography and its cultural presence are expansive. The landscape of Marfa – its dry climate, endless vistas, wide blue skies, and flat plains interrupted by jagged, barren mountain ranges – has always been written about as a character in its history. The landscape is not just a setting, or background; it is also a part of the story, and the story is developed in response and relation to the landscape. That the landscape is inherent to the story is not unique to Marfa; however it seems to be particularly intense here. This is perhaps because of the intensity of the physical environment. The sun is harsh, the storms, if rare, are intense with hail and thunder, the lack of rain creates droughts that are intense with their implications. Concurrently, the cultural landscape is just as intense because of the varied histories of Marfa: the ranching, the proximity to and relationship to the border, the military presence, and finally, the art. The story of Donald Judd and the last twenty years of Marfa have created a cultural

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<sup>136</sup> Wright, John K. "Terra Incognita: The Place of the Imagination in Geography." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 37.1 (1947): 1-15.

intensity that goes well beyond the borders of Marfa, Presidio County, and Texas. Artists, writers, musicians, and the like all travel to Marfa to experience this expansiveness. Marfa is impressive for its aesthetic qualities and its culture embraces artists of varying fields. In order to understand what is Marfa and why it is so, we also must look at Marfa on visual terms in conjunction with academic ones.

Landscape exerts a subtle power over people, eliciting a broad range of emotions and meanings that may be difficult to specify.<sup>137</sup> We look at landscape, we draw it, we photograph it, we paint it. We interpret landscape. There is a constant attempt to understand and at times control landscape, because we both love and fear it. The work of artists, geographers, anthropologists, and historians each serves to understand, decipher, interpret and then represent this landscape.

Marfa is a spacious landscape, and the details should be viewed with patience. It was the work of J.B. Jackson<sup>138</sup> that inspired an appreciation of the vernacular landscape and how this told the story of place. The landscape of Marfa is composed of a multitude of physical structures and components of the vernacular, in addition to the kind of specific design and architecture heralded by critics and architectural journals. This dichotomy of place is what makes walking through Marfa so interesting: old is juxtaposed against new, form follows function and, while there are various kinds of people that both live in and visit Marfa, the distinction among them is not always apparent. True, there are modern and minimal homes that signify wealth, and there are dilapidated adobes and trailers that signify a lack of wealth, but it is misleading to think

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<sup>137</sup> Mitchell, W. J. T. *Landscape and Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994.

<sup>138</sup> Among his many books, see Jackson, John Brinckerhoff. *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984; and issues of *Landscape* magazine (1951-1994), for which he was founder, publisher and editor until 1968.

that perceptions are anything but deceiving. The structures and homes of Marfa are as diverse as its people.

Marfa's main drag – South Highland Avenue – and nearly every street on the grid is noticeably wider than average city streets, a quality that enhances the space: it's hard to feel physically claustrophobic in Marfa. While most homes in town have a modest or near-modest footprint in terms of yard space, those on the edge of town have more acreage that pushes out into the vastness of surrounding ranchland. With this wide landscape comes calmness, and despite the fact that barking dogs, passing trains and industrial semis periodically break up the silence, there remains an overarching abundance of quietude throughout town.

The revealing visual qualities of the landscape change depending on how you approach Marfa. From Fort Davis, to the north, you pass the Marfa Municipal Airport (formerly an auxiliary field to the Army Airfield) and the Village Farms tomato farm, both located just off the highway. Once you enter town, you drive by a few blocks of residential housing, guided by the tall, silvery water tower (Figure 3.1), then you are directed to turn west to continue on Route 17, passing the courthouse and arriving to South Highland Avenue. If you choose to stay straight on the road instead, you dead-end at the railroad tracks but can turn either way to regroup. It's nearly impossible to get lost in Marfa, as almost any turn will eventually lead you to one of the two main roads.

From Valentine, the old Stardust Hotel sign more or less marks your arrival. Then, the cemetery is to the north, fencing still marking the segregation of Anglo to Mexican; an RV park; Mando's restaurant; a drive-through liquor store; Moonlight Gemstones; Alice's Café; a Stripes gas station with a Subway; the Dairy Queen; the Pueblo Market; and the refurbished Thunderbird Hotel. The vintage Holiday Inn Capri sign now advertises the contemporary space Ballroom Marfa's latest exhibition. There



are various garages to service cars; the “Museum of Electronic Wonders and Late Night Grilled Cheese Parlour;” and Food Shark’s parking lot of over sixteen vintage cars, Planet Marfa (a beer garden); Livingston Insurance and Real Estate offices; St. Mary’s Catholic church; and the Marfa and Presidio County History Museum.

From Presidio and Ojinaga to the south, you pass Judd’s *15 Untitled Works in Concrete* on the west side of the highway, installed on what was a polo field for Fort D.A. Russell. The rest of the Chinati Foundation buildings stand in the background. There is the sprawling acreage of the alternative hotel and camping space El Cosmico with its scattered teepees, yurts and vintage trailers; then Marfa Burrito; a Mobil gas station; the Marfa National Bank; and a gallery space, exhibitions 2D.

From Alpine to the east, another RV Park (the Tumble In); the Riata Inn; the Dollar General; ABC Pump Hardware (which is now Marfa Hardware); Carmen’s restaurant: closed; Borunda’s Restaurant; Fieldwork Marfa (which was Galleri Urbane); Stay Marfa; Wild Woolies’ sign is painted over which means: closed; the Velvet Antler (which was Fancy Pony Land); Ballroom Marfa; another Stripes; and as you approach the four-way blinking red light, another two gas stations; Marfa Contemporary; Pizza Foundation (yes, a play on the many foundations in Marfa); Marfa Studio of the Arts; and City Hall.

Heading north from the intersection up South Highland Avenue brings you home to the main drag, as it were: more City of Marfa offices, Marfa Public Radio, the Marfa Book Company, and Tienda M, a gift shop, on your right; the large, white, former hotel-converted-to-Judd-offices on your left. The simple red letters spelling “Judd” above the corner doors are the only markers of its owners. Most windows are shaded or opaque and reflective, creating an eerie world of interior space against a much brighter exterior world.

Then, the large shade structure just south of the railroad tracks, where Food Shark will park its silver truck most days and where Saturday's Farm Stand Marfa takes place. North of the tracks is the Marfa Post Office, the John Chamberlain building of the Chinati Foundation, which was the Wool and Mohair Company building; a barber shop; the Big Bend Sentinel's offices; the Glascock Building, now Judd's, advertising architecture; the old Marfa National Bank Building: now, Judd's; the Brite Building, now the Ayn Foundation's galleries; the west Texas Utilities Building, now Future Shark restaurant; the Masonic Building, now a gym; the Marfa Museum Thrift Store; the historic Hotel Paisano; the Palace Theater, now occupied by the illustrator David Kimble, Eugene Binder gallery; the Texas Theater: which had been occupied by the late historian Cecilia Thompson; and finally, leading the parade: the coral-hued courthouse.

Names and numbers don't reveal much context until you are there, walking on the sidewalk or pavement. Every space has not been named, and I somehow feel a need to fix that, but I also feel hesitation in naming as many stores as I have: without a doubt some will close, a new owner will try his luck at something else. Or it will remain vacant space.

Visibly, Marfa is fairly akin to other small Texas towns. Sure, it doesn't look like much, but many of the storefronts show a careful maintenance that is evidence of its bustling, if sometimes hidden, community. Some buildings and homes are more buttoned up than others, and it can be difficult to determine with any certainty if one space is occupied and another isn't. The creative-minded owners here seem to have a special affinity for keeping the layers of paint and signage that has been worn over the years. It's a visible marker of history, evidence that the past is right here with us, and that if you look closely enough, the markings can be seen as beautiful.

The housing in Marfa tells a similar but far more diverse story, with most consisting of architecturally simple structures, worn by the climate, hiding an interior

oasis for refuge from the weather. There are, of course, plenty of homes in Marfa that are carefully maintained in their stark minimalism. The newer, updated homes with minimal design keep in line with the Judd aesthetic of Marfa, but they are not the norm. (Figure 3.2).

To experience the varying architectural diversity of one hundred-plus years of housing, taking a walk before dawn or after dusk provides the most comfortable setting. Each road seems to have its own personality, and home styles offer a great deal of diversity: Adobe, brick, concrete, pre-fab, mobile home, corrugated siding, corrugated fencing, wood fencing, iron fencing, no fencing. Adobe was the primary building construction until after World War II. It's a vernacular architecture, composed of native materials. The bricks were often made directly at the building site. On some of the crumbling walls, you can see fragments of ceramic and bone, signifying the use of whatever material was lying around at the time of construction.

White homes, blue homes, beige homes, sea green homes, gray homes. There are some historic ranching homes with a more defined style, often with some form of Mediterranean or Spanish influence, but many homes lack a definite style, instead taking portions of a craftsman or federal design. The wrap porch is a visual delight, stone veneer hides its true construction, and the brick homes seem heavy for this climate.

The roofs are shed, hip and gable, the wood often begging for replacement. Metal is the sensible choice, and unless painted, sharply reflects sunlight.

In the yards: tires, plastic trash bins, children's toys, lawn ornaments, bicycles (always unlocked), planters, rocks stacked with intention, bird feeders, wine and beer bottles artfully placed as if sculpture, tumbleweeds. Skulls on posts. "Peace on earth" reads one sign.

Dogs barking, dogs barking, dogs barking.

“For sale” signs are everywhere.

It is not uncommon to pass a horse and rider.

There are really good rains in the summer. You put everything aside and move a chair to the screen door and just listen. The smell of rain in Marfa is intense, and the dark, heavy clouds slowly roll in from the mountains. Often, the clouds hold at the edge of town as if both threatening and tempting you, and the storm moves elsewhere.

Trees provide shade to the homes. From the air, Marfa’s heavy growth of oak delineates it from the surrounding desert landscape. Some yards are more or less composed of dirt, some are carefully watered and mowed grass, most are some mixture of the two. Trying to keep a healthy lawn is fighting a losing battle with nature. Xeriscaping of pebbles, stones, rocks, combined with the cacti so common in the Southwest, forms the landscape.

The edges of town offer up extraordinary views of the surrounding terrain that will slowly and eventually lead up to a mountain. There are the Davis Mountains to the north and east, the Cretaceous flats to the southeast, the Bofecillos, Chinati, Sierra Vieja, and Van Horn Mountains to the southwest.<sup>139</sup> Marfa is semi-protected in the basin between all of this at an elevation of 4,688 feet above sea level. These mountains reveal the history of the landscape and its uses; the trails have been worn into the earth, mapping physically what cultures and people have passed through. First, it was the Apaches, then cattlemen, then prohibition smugglers, then Mexican immigrants and the Border Patrol. Richard Long, whose work is on display at the Chinati Foundation, may have stamped his

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<sup>139</sup> Shurbet, D. H., and C. C. Reeves. "The Fill in Marfa Basin, Texas." *AAPG Bulletin* 61 (1977): 612-15.

way through the landscape in the name of art, but he can't compete with the varied history of a long-worn trail.<sup>140</sup>

## Space and Place

We may look at Marfa through the lenses of space and place, and by way of this, placelessness. Space itself is a more concrete thing that can be measured, photographed or altered. When we think of space we think of area or cubic feet, or tangible things that we can visualize in our heads if not before our eyes. Space is a setting that we can take part in, either individually or collectively, through movement and experience. Space is the background of our lives and is what we build homes and buildings and roads on. We take up space by our movements and voices, and we conquer and repurpose space; we work to free some spaces and sometimes to destroy others. Space is not a given; it is constructed, and this construction is dependent on social, economic, and historical factors. For Donald Judd, actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface.<sup>141</sup> The physical quality of space – and even the absence of it – is a powerful component of our lives. In Marfa, the qualities of space defined by way of Judd's work serve to define the experience of place.

The landscape of west Texas is the setting for the space of Marfa. Marfa's space is the town's small grid, with its central courthouse and two main arteries dividing the

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<sup>140</sup> Richard Long's *Sea Lava Circles*, 1988 is on display at the Chinati Collection. Long is often referred to as land artist and first made a name for himself as a student in 1967 with his *A Line Made for Walking*. He walked back and forth along a straight line to create a visual marker of his presence, then photographed the work. This and other works combine the qualities of land art, sculpture, and conceptual and performance art. See Moorhouse, Paul, and Denise Hooker. *Richard Long: Walking the Line*. Londre: Thames & Hudson, 2002.

<sup>141</sup> Judd, Donald. *Complete Writings, 1959-1975: Gallery Reviews, Book Reviews, Articles, Letters to the Editor, Reports, Statements, Complaints*. Halifax, N.S.: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975.

area into four quadrants. The railroad tracks that intersect the town, the adobe homes, the mobile trailers - each structure is a component of the space. Together these spaces form the landscape of Marfa.

There is an eerie quality of Marfa throughout the daylight hours. Unless there is an event happening resulting in a surge of people to the outdoors (the parade during the Marfa Lights Festival, for instance) the space of Marfa is relatively quiet and absent of people. However, being a functioning town with various daily happenings – folks in and out of the post office, incoming and departing guests to the Paisano Hotel, the judge and staff of the courthouse carrying on with business – there is a presence that permeates this town as in any other. This is to say that Marfa is no ghost town despite a general lack of crowding. Windows are washed, sidewalks are swept, and buildings undergo repairs. In this way the space of Marfa is empty and alive at the same time.

Place is lived space. Place is the more intangible realm that is both dependent on and complementary to the space, for one cannot exist without the other. There are countless ways that place in Marfa can be experienced, based on the needs and desires of the user. Following Tuan, this is referred to as experiential perspective,<sup>142</sup> where experience is the culmination of sensation, perception, and conception.

Place is filled with meaning and context, and it means different things to different people. What does the place of Marfa entail? It is the combination of the actors who live there and those who are visiting. It is the quiet activity that occurs each weekday inside the courthouse, or the sounds of the espresso machine inside Frama, where a two-person line constitutes a rush. It is the patio of Jett's Grill in the Hotel Paisano on an early

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<sup>142</sup> Tuan, Yi-fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1977.

evening, when it is cool enough to sit outside and where you are more likely to know someone there than not.

This place of Marfa is specific to each individual, and place must be understood in the larger context of experience and observation. We can divide the users of Marfa in various ways, but it comes down to this: the residents and the tourists. Among the residents that place themselves in Marfa, there are further delineated groups of people: the Hispanic population, the ranchers, and the artists. For these residents, the place of Marfa is home, perhaps uneventful, the quotidian acts of an existence where one works at a job (or jobs), raises a family, maintains a home, etc. A local may never eat at the pricey Cochineal restaurant or see anything created by Donald Judd. A local may work at the Border Patrol and may spend his day in that easily identifiable white Border Patrol SUV with the green stripes, sitting strangely by the railroad track for hours, taking his lunch at the Stripes, eating dinner at Borunda's.

For the tourist, the place of Marfa is something to be contained or captured, to be experienced and then checked off a list. The world of the tourist is a specific, contained experience, and one that is very different from a local's. The tourists may be invested in art, social, musical, educational, or environmental elements, and certainly any combination of these.

While the Chinati and Judd Foundations draw in a respectable amount of visitors each year, an increasing trend in Marfa as a destination-wedding place is expanding the tourism industry. There are intensive multi-day courses in design and architecture put on by local foundations and non-profits, multiple music and film festivals.<sup>143</sup> While the tourist may come to Marfa with a specific agenda in mind, the nature of tourism allows

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<sup>143</sup> Some examples of these events are the following: Marfa Film Festival, CineMarfa film festival, Marfa Dialogues, Trans-Pecos Music Festival, MARFArchitecture + Design Symposium.

for the cross-pollination of areas of interest. Someone coming to Marfa to attend a wedding may also engage in the local art scene, or with nature, or perhaps take an aerial tour. Because of this it can be very difficult to accurately describe the people of Marfa, despite my attempts to throughout this writing.

Edward Relph writes that we often neither experience nor create places with more than a superficial and casual involvement,<sup>144</sup> and that this superficiality is what creates placelessness. However, having meaning is not possible for every individual in every place, and an important place for me might be a placeless place for someone else. The placeless world is a world without individuality, the cause of this being technology and transportation. Speed and time have become warped and they corrupt the ways in which we interact with our environment, but in a way they have also allowed for Marfa's sustainability as a small and remote town. Residents of Marfa can telecommute to work, meaning they do not have to be dependent on Marfa's small economy for employment. The growth of social media allows for the dispersion of Marfa's identity to the outside world, making it remote but not isolated.

Placelessness can have another meaning, though, in the context of Marfa, for as Marfa is a small and remote town, it is in this way somewhat placeless. It's just another ranching town. It's just another Dairy Queen, just another Dollar General, just another block of trailer homes, and just another town where the wealthy historically have lived on one side of the tracks and the working-class Mexicans have lived on the other side. To the large portion of the population that has nothing to do with Chinati, or Judd, or any of the other foundations, it's really not anything special. From this superficial perspective, Marfa is placeless. Further, in the ways in which it has become a tourist attraction by way

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<sup>144</sup> Relph, E. C. *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion, 1976.



of its various cultural productions, it's just another place of tourism, where the locals experience their insider Marfa and the tourists experience a very specific, produced, outsider Marfa. Marfa has been somewhat divided into two identities: the place of the locals and the place of the tourists. But as the details of place are uncovered, and the stories of the residents heard, Marfa's placelessness disappears for me. Instead this small and remote town, similar to so many other small and remote towns elsewhere, becomes a unique place where its history meets its tourism meets its geography.

What does it mean to be placeless when looking at Marfa on a superficial level? What does it mean to live in a tiny town, where the nearest commercial airport is three hours away? Is this a placeless place for those who don't see it as anything special? Does this contrarily give Marfa that much more richness and meaning to someone who makes the journey to get here? Marfa is special to those who choose to see it as something special. Those who neither know of nor care to learn about Donald Judd and his works, but who intimately know Marfa, have an entirely different experience of place.

A shrine to the Virgin Mary stands in the yard of a small dilapidated home at the former entrance to Fort D.A. Russell. The late Hector Sanchez saw an apparition of the Virgin Mary in 1994 in his backyard and felt compelled to build the shrine in response to this.<sup>145</sup> This is a place of reverence to Catholic pilgrims, much like the Chinati Foundation is for art pilgrims, but what is most interesting is that these pilgrims likely have no knowledge of the others' presence. The place of Marfa, for each, is an entirely separate experience, and although their paths may literally cross, they are otherwise oblivious to each other. The art patrons are on a pilgrimage to Chinati, while the religious patrons are on a pilgrimage to the shrine to the Virgin Mary. While Chinati's acreage is

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<sup>145</sup> van Ryzin, Jeanne Claire. "A Little Take on Marfa's Culture Clash." *Austin American-Statesman* 26 October 2011.

fenced and protected, and the interior spaces are clean and minimal, the yard in which this shrine is located is scattered with debris, some leftover gifts from the pilgrims and others just, well, the physical markings of a culture (Figure 3.3). For those who have traveled to Marfa to see this shrine, place means something very different.

Marc Augé investigates the ways in which people have become decentered from both themselves and their surroundings due in large part to an ever-expanding world of globalization and, what he notes, excess.<sup>146</sup> In his first edition of *Non-places*, the focus is on the duality of place and the non-place, where the place is a positive, real space and the non-place is an in-between, lesser-valued space. The place is our home, our office, etc. while the non-place is the toll-road, the airport or some such social or cultural dead zone. Augé focuses on the sterility of the airport and the wasted time surrounding air travel, but by way of this earlier argument one could say that the roadway travel from Austin to Marfa is filled with these non-places: the gas station or Burger King off of Interstate 10, for example, whose purpose is to refuel and then dismiss its patrons. If Austin (or Houston, New York, Los Angeles, Berlin, etc.) is our home and Marfa is our destination, then the time filled between departing from and arriving to is ostensibly filled with wasted time and place. There is a global uniformity that Augé suggests is what makes these places boring, or unworthy. Of course, cultural geographers like myself can disagree with Augé's thesis. While Marfa has been my destination for the past three years, there is plenty of landscape, space and place to experience on the six-hour drive from Austin. My intention, admittedly, is not to see these other sites, but I know that they are out there and worthy of my attention.

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<sup>146</sup>Augé, Marc. *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. London: Verso, 1995, 2009.

If uniformity across elements of modern life is dull or sterile, then what is the uniform in Marfa? There is the standard Dairy Queen, there are two Stripes, one of which has a Subway, and there is the Dollar General. These branded stores are found throughout the country and almost always act as an anchor to a small town. The Dairy Queen is the same in Marfa as it is in next-door Alpine, and were you to go to a Dairy Queen in any other state you know you would see identical offerings on the menu. There is a consistency in sameness. These uniform, sterile components of Marfa – or anywhere – actually tell quite a revealing story. Where Augé writes that these places of uniformity, or meeting and exchange, are non-places, they are in actuality where much of the detail occurs.

The Dairy Queen in Marfa is the place to go to see the “real” people of Marfa. What is this real Marfa? It is the Marfan who is making an average salary of \$34,000. It is the Marfan who works on the ranch or runs a garage. Yes, the Chinati intern or the German tourist and the owner of the coffee shop may stop in there from time to time, but there is no pretense or expectation in the Dairy Queen. It’s cheap and simple fried food. While not all locals may engage with the various art offerings, almost all locals and tourists at one point or another will engage with the DQ. At the Dollar General you can find an assortment of discounted household items just as you can in any other Dollar General in the country. You can also interact with locals and tourists alike, again without any pretense or expectation. If there is an expectation it is that you will fill your basket with a few needed items and be done with it. Is this a comforting thought, or simply another component of life to live and be forgotten?

While I argue that Marfa is a special place, for many reasons but ultimately owing to the impact of Donald Judd, it remains for some just another small town in America. Even looking at the grid of town shows just how similar it is to other towns. There is the

central courthouse, the four quadrants that expand from this center, the railroad that divides the town again into north and south. There are unique restaurants in Marfa: Maiya's and Cochineal; there is a small independent bookstore: Marfa Book Company; there are scattered shops showcasing local and Mexican crafts: Tienda M, Freda, Velvet Antler. While Augé writes that big towns, wherever in the world they may be, are themselves summaries of the world with ethnic, cultural, religious, social and economic diversity we don't have to limit this notion to the large town or city. This idea of a worldly, cultural summation can also be found in small towns. While Marfa may have the only Pizza Foundation, or Frama coffee shop, or Mando's restaurant, these establishments represent which elements collectively make and create any town, anywhere.

Of course the journey, the experience of getting from Austin to Marfa, is exactly what Augé is dismissing. The journey is the reward. The journey is a key component, and depending on where one's interest lies, the journey itself could be more interesting than any restaurant or gallery that one visits while in Marfa. In fact, many folks ultimately miss a lot of the charm and beauty of Marfa because they are too caught up with "seeing" everything – and once something is "seen" it can be checked off of a list and forgotten. Once a photograph has been taken, documenting a person or an event in a space at a time, it's back in the car and onto the next location.

A place without a story is really nowhere at all.<sup>147</sup> In this way Marfa is a collection of stories as varied and diverse as its residents and visitors. Some of the placing of Marfa is focused on a very specific agenda - that of fine art and culture - but Marfa's place is not so easily distilled. Each character in the many stories of Marfa is

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<sup>147</sup> Cameron, Ardis. "When Strangers Bring Cameras: The Poetics and Politics of Othered Places." *American Quarterly* 54.3 (2002): 411-35.

using the space to meet her own demands and intentions. The shared spaces of Marfa are produced and maintained, and there is a constant recycling of space, because small towns have to change too. The surrounding mountains and desert terrain protect Marfa, but more than this physical geography protects it. The distance to the highways and major airports and cities protect it. The lack of water and resources protect it. The hidden, non-headlined daily workings of its residents protect it. There is more to life than landscape, but “to divorce life from landscape is to invite the kind of alienation all too apparent in the world.”<sup>148</sup> Marfa’s identity remains tied to and dependent on its physical landscape, but also its cultural and social landscape.

### **Marfa from Above**

The first time I traveled to Marfa, in 2007, I befriended a pilot, Burt Compton, who runs a business out of the small airport north of town, the Marfa Municipal Airport. Compton has lived in Marfa for a little over a decade and is invested in a very specific way to Marfa as a pilot. One day we took off in his small Cessna and headed south to the airfield so that I could photograph from above the closed and decaying military earthwork. We cruised at one thousand feet, and then started spiraling down, lowering our altitude with each complete turn so that I could get different perspectives of the airfield. As we leveled out at our lowest elevation, Burt acted as if we were going to land on one of the runways, a mimicked touch-and-go, instead flying about six feet above the ground so that I could take a closer look and prepare for my work on the ground the next day.

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<sup>148</sup> Meinig, Donald. “Geography as an Art.” *Transaction of the Institute of British Geographers* 8.3 (1983): 314-328.

One can see clear imprints on the landscape of the army airfield when looking from above via Google Maps, and it is deceptive to try to see a closed airfield from the ground because you can't experience the complete layout. To the pedestrian, the concrete or asphalt is broken; each crack is an opportunity for green foliage. The runways grow more vegetation than the flight line because of the difference in asphalt grade, and are therefore distinguished by large trees, whereas the flight line is less verdant. The concrete foundations from former buildings dot the landscape but make no sort of larger impression on the space. This you may notice when you are physically standing on the airfield. Their space is occupied on the ground in a horizontal framework that is invisible to the passing motorist. As such, many airfields go unnoticed because they have no vertical identity.

To get two thousand or three thousand feet above an airfield, however, is to see a new space emerge, and when flying commercially at even higher elevations, airports are among the most noticeable landmarks. The imprint is unmistakable, and the runways, flight lines, and foundations come together as one complete whole, whereas on the ground they appear jumbled. It is at this higher elevation that the airfield is no longer an abandoned or closed, forgotten landscape. From the ground, the airfield is humble, a secret landscape. From above, its history is pronounced, demanding attention and reverence. Nature is an active player working against the airfield, but the airfield has perseverance. It wants to stay, to be remembered.

Much like the experience of its abandoned airfield from above, Marfa is for many the experience of art, by way of the work of Donald Judd. You have to change your perspective, see the work at different times of day, move around the work, so that you can witness the change in color and light that allows the work to pulsate. This experience is how space becomes place, and it is a process that takes time and patience. The more

time you spend in Marfa, the more the place reveals itself to you. There is something very special, and very necessary, about walking the land as an artist and a geographer. Each step is almost a fight against the rugged terrain – the ground is dry and hard – and the desert shrub is dense and stubborn. The sun is relentless and I have a continued appreciation for the ranchers who are able to withstand this environment day in and day out.

I've walked the airfield four or five times now. The first time, I was able to track down the ranch manager to ask his permission. I didn't want to trespass on anyone's property, and most land is private in the Big Bend and in the rest of Texas. I told him about my project and he said it was fine if I wanted to walk around, adding at the last moment, "Don't call me if you get stung by a rattler." I appreciated his candor and informality, and I have yet to encounter a snake.

The landowner, Brad Kelley, is absentee, and has bought a good deal of land in Presidio County, often leasing it back to ranchers for grazing. Kelley is the fourth-largest landowner in the United States, and is known for his conservation efforts as well as for supplying zoos with hoofstock.<sup>149</sup>

During my repeated visits, I was able to track different areas of the field and was always able to see something new, something that I hadn't noticed before. As I am on the ground, the landscape slowly reveals itself to me.

One morning I am climbing up and over the fence in the corner of the Marfa Lights Viewing Station area, careful not to tear my jeans on the barbed wire. It's just past 7:30 and about 70 degrees. I secure my sun hat and trot south. A fly is on my tail for nearly the entire length of time I am out there, and it's the only annoying distraction of

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<sup>149</sup> Keates, Nancy. "The Man With a Million Acres." *The Wall Street Journal* 25 Oct. 2012.

my morning. The further I walk into the field, the fainter the sound of cars passing on the highway becomes, and eventually I am left with only the sound of my walking, the flapping of crows' wings overhead, and the scuttle of small and hurried lizards. Each sound is an echo and my ears slowly adjust. They are more fine-tuned out here, alone.

As I come to the ramp where the planes parked, and where there is now a fence dividing grazing areas, I see six horses, one with a young colt, drinking and sweeping their tails. They see me and do not stop staring. Two of them move closer to the others. They appear to be afraid of me, so I hook around so as to be out of their way. In two moves I am over the barbed wire, and my feet touch the concrete of the former ramp. During my walk I pass a plethora of cattle, horse, and antelope waste; it's a good measure to determine how long the land has been out of grazing cycle and which animal breeds are occupying it currently. You've really got to look down half the time to avoid it.

I walk straight down the ramp, due south, and towards the first runway. The trees are taller, fuller. Then, I walk northwest on the runway and turn north to meet back up with the ramp. I'm at the northern end on the west side of the installation, where the remnants of hangars still sit. It always amazes me to see the iron, glass, and brick, left there without concern, but these castaways are something I appreciate. I take a few iron wheel joints from the hangar door mechanism to add to my collection – at this point it is a ritual – and I observe the many red bricks scattered on the ground. “GROESBECK REDS” is stamped on their faces.

Before long I start to really feel the sun, so I start to head north towards the car. One good thing about the Marfa Lights Viewing Center is that it serves as a prominent marker on my walk; without it I may have become lost out there. The sun is inching its way higher in the sky, and by the time I am back at the car it's already 88 degrees at 9:15 a.m. I head back to town to make breakfast.



By the time I got into a glider with Burt he had already taken me up on two aerial shoots on previous visits. He is a friendly and knowledgeable pilot. He instructed me into the seat of the small, white and very lightweight glider, or sailplane, and within a few minutes the tow plane started to move. A young boy, who was in town from Dallas with his family specifically to go flying, held the glider's wing balanced as we gathered speed, then took off. Flying with the tow line feels almost as if an umbilical chord is keeping you alive (which in, a way, is exactly what it is) and the tension on the line exerts a subtle physical reminder of the connection between the two flying machines. Within a few minutes, we were at a high enough elevation that the tow plane could release us.

Right at that moment, when the umbilical chord comes off, you are weightless. And then, that moment doesn't stop. The tow plane starts to descend, but Burt and I continue in an ever-so-slight spiral that, if done properly, can last for hours.

The military's choosing of Marfa for the World War II airfield was largely based on the pre-existence of Fort D.A. Russell. Still, the weather conditions made for year-long training, and they have translated into year-long gliding for Burt. Marfa is situated between the Pacific Ocean to the west, which brings dry air, and the Gulf of Mexico to the east, which brings moist air, and what results is a dew point line – also called the Marfa front – that creates a lifting point in the air. Pockets of warm air are what keep a glider in the sky, so to stay in the air as long as possible, a pilot needs to stay in that warm pocket or move in and out of multiple ones. Gliding is both an art and a science, as evidenced by the technology and skill required, and the beauty in the way a glider smoothly rolls through the sky. Even the aircraft is a work of art, and Burt makes a parallel from the minimalism of a glider to the minimalism of much of the art in Marfa. I

take the connection further back to Le Corbusier:<sup>150</sup> the aircraft design utilizes exactly what it needs and nothing more. There is no excess. A longtime reporter in Marfa, Sterry Butcher, has said there is “everything you need and nothing more in Marfa. There is no excess at all.”<sup>151</sup> Seeing Marfa from above allows me to visualize this sentiment in the form of the town’s small grid and quaint footprint.

## Conclusion

Marfa is a landscape, a space, and a place. It is for some placeless, because it is just another small town, but through looking at the details of its physical and cultural structure it becomes rich with character and detail that both define the town and also set it apart from other locations. Marfa’s physical geography and location have contributed to the ways in which its cultural identity has been shaped. Like all landscapes, Marfa is constructed, and means different things to different people, depending on how the space is used and for what purpose. At any given time Marfa is host to both residents and tourists, and in general Marfa is composed of Hispanics, ranchers and artists. These various folks experience Marfa differently, and the smallness of the town and the lack of excess underlie a sometimes hidden but complicated structure. Through experience of Marfa as a place, this structure can reveal itself, and it is through this process that the detail, beauty, and strangeness of Marfa are made tangible.

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<sup>150</sup> Le, Corbusier, Jean-Louis Cohen, and John Goodman. *Toward an Architecture*. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2007.

<sup>151</sup> Silverstein, Jake. "Sterry Butcher, Small-Town Newspaper Reporter." *Texas Monthly*. August, 2007.



Figure 3.1 Marfa's water tower in 2013, by author



Figure 3.2: Old and new Marfa in 2013, from Google Maps





Figure 3.3: Shrine to the Virgin Mary in Marfa in 2013, by author

## CHAPTER 4: DONALD JUDD IN MARFA

The placing of Marfa in contemporary culture can be explicitly traced to the arrival of incoming artist Donald Judd in the early 1970s. Between the years 1971-1994, Judd explored his ideas on art, life, and space, using the town as his canvas. It is by way of his untimely death in 1994, perhaps, that Marfa would be able to transform again, but this time via a new wave of incoming residents who installed not art, but infrastructure. These new spaces and businesses would allow for a continuous, albeit slow, growth of Marfa, attracting even more new residents, some permanent, some part-time. Throughout the decades, the attraction to Marfa remains the same: the vast and beautiful, and perhaps desolate landscape, coupled with the incredible light, continues to draw people. Without the presence of Judd, the fate of Marfa is left to speculation, but many natives agree that Marfa had been “dying on the vine” with “no traffic, no nothing”<sup>152</sup> before his arrival, with several businesses shuttered and streets empty. That Marfa’s beauty and isolation would have perhaps drawn some other artist or artists is entirely possible. As it stands now, we have the work of Judd to place in Marfa’s history and identity.

Yet today, Marfa is no longer about only Donald Judd. It has become a place of inspiration for many creative types, demonstrated by the various types of cultural productions available. This evolution of Marfa further places it on the cultural map but also adds some controversy to its identity. By way of media attention and written and visual journalism, in addition to the growing influence of social media, Marfa’s quirkiness and strangeness are made even more a spectacle, which in turn contributes to a particular expectation on the part of the tourist. Marfa’s popularity has in some ways

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<sup>152</sup> Butcher, Sterry. "Striving for Balance, Marfa Comes of Age." *The Big Bend Sentinel*(Marfa), October 9, 2003.

narrowed its identity to the outside, which presents the tourist with a greater challenge upon his arrival to town. On the surface, Marfa may seem like a simple, small town, but in reality it is a complex environment wherein its history, environment, climate, location and economy all contribute to its identity, which cannot be deciphered with one visit.

## **Getting to Marfa**

Donald Judd was born in 1928 in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, and died in 1994 in Manhattan at the age of 65. He served in the Army from 1946-47 as an engineer for the Corps of Engineers, traveling to Korea. Afterward he studied philosophy at Columbia University and did work toward a master's degree in art history that he never completed. He also studied art at the Art Students League in New York. Until his mostly permanent move to Marfa in the 1970s, he lived and worked in New York City, at first supporting himself by writing art criticism. His writing places himself in a specific context in the art world, and in many ways it was strategic. Through his hundreds of reviews, succinct and deliberate in their delivery (on Morris Louis: "This show is much better than Louis' previous one, although it is mixed in quality"),<sup>153</sup> Judd was able to prepare the reader for his own development of the ideas on art and space for which he would become famous. This large quantity of writing from Judd – the art reviews, the magazine pieces summarizing his theories and ideas, and his later writing on Marfa, on art and architecture – allows us access into the mind of this opinionated but brilliant artist.

In Judd's best-known essay, "Specific Objects,"<sup>154</sup> published in 1965, he explores the varied qualities of what he believes to be the best new work being created, that is

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<sup>153</sup> Judd, D. (1975). *Complete writings, 1959-1975: Gallery reviews, book reviews, articles, letters to the editor, reports, statements, complaints*. Halifax, N.S.: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

<sup>154</sup> Judd, D. (1965). Specific Objects. *Arts Yearbook*, 8, 74-82.

“neither painting nor sculpture” but “related, closely or distantly, to one or the other.” Painting, he writes, is “a rectangular plane placed flat against the wall,” and that this structure limits the outcome. The rectangular plane “determines and limits” the space in and around the painting. Sculpture is “made part by part, by addition, composed.” The “usual materials” of wood and metal limit the result. The contemporary work being produced at the time of his writing was moving past the historic qualities of painting and sculpture. From the removal of the artist’s hand (“Art could be mass-produced”), to the varied industrial materials in use, to products that are “simply forms,” these contemporary objects “are specific.”

Despite the fact that he is talking of the work of his peers throughout the essay, Judd’s writing is really a way to justify his own work and its placement in art history.<sup>155</sup> The entire opus of Judd’s career can be characterized in this sentence: “It isn’t necessary for a work to have a lot of things to look at...The thing as a whole, its quality as a whole, is what is interesting.”<sup>156</sup> Judd’s work is experienced at once, as a whole, and to quote Roberta Smith, “There is a kind of narrative experience.”<sup>157</sup> Written at a time when Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried were the leading art journalists, Judd’s writing is in general disagreement with their respective voices.<sup>158</sup> In his “Complaints, Part I,”<sup>159</sup> Judd briefly articulates why he thinks both Greenberg and Fried are wrong. Greenberg writes “only approval and disapproval” while not adding anything to the thinking of an

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<sup>155</sup> In the published essay, one of Judd’s pieces is included as an illustration, but he notes that “The editor, not I, included the photograph of my work.” The essay includes 17 photographs and Judd references about 45 artists.

<sup>156</sup> Phrases from “Specific Objects.”

<sup>157</sup> See Smith’s written lecture in Stockebrand, Marianne. *The Writings of Donald Judd: A Symposium Hosted by the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas, May 3-4, 2008*. Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation, 2009.

<sup>158</sup> See Greenberg, Clement. *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Boston: Beacon, 1989; Fried, Michael. *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998.

<sup>159</sup> Judd, Donald. “Complaints, Part I.” *Studio International*, April, 1969.



artist's work, he says, and he writes that Fried's *Art and Objecthood* of 1967 is "stupid." His succinct, straightforward approach to criticizing both art and the art critics give his generation a specific voice as well. Just as Judd is challenging the methods of his fellow artists, he is not afraid to challenge art's placement in history as defined by the best-known critics.

In 1968, Judd bought 101 Spring Street in Manhattan's Soho neighborhood, and his modification and installations there are both living and work spaces. Their sparse design works with the building's preexisting architecture and history, something Judd was interested in. We can consider his Marfa project to be the second, much larger iteration of these ideas on art and life, on art and architecture, and on architecture and history.<sup>160</sup> Judd was able to weave his interests and the history of the spaces he overtook into one continuous, complex, fluid identity. For Judd, art was to be lived with, was a part of the interior design of a space. Further, his work was not simply a painting on a flat surface, mounted on a wall. Nor was it a sculpture of expected material, displayed on a podium. It was a part of the room and its structure seemed to be a part of the floor or wall, as if it had been built there along with the architecture.

Judd became increasingly skeptical of museums after seeing his work damaged by being moved and installed in spaces that were ill fitting to the art.<sup>161</sup> Museums were also crowded and did not allow for an ideal interaction between the work and its viewer, which Judd thought should take plenty of time, and space.<sup>162</sup> For Judd, the consideration

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<sup>160</sup> Stockebrand, Marianne, Donald Judd, and Rudi Fuchs. *Chinati: The Vision of Donald Judd*. Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation, 2010.

<sup>161</sup> See Judd, Donald. "Complaints, Part II." *Arts Magazine*, June, 1973 for a detailed review of damages. He describes the mishandling of his work by art handlers, the carelessness of museum staff and guards, and the failure of catalogues to accurately reflect the details of each work.

<sup>162</sup> Judd, Donald. *Complete Writings, 1959-1975: Gallery Reviews, Book Reviews, Articles, Letters to the Editor, Reports, Statements, Complaints*. Halifax, N.S.: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975.

of a work's installation was equally weighted to the work itself.<sup>163</sup> Further, the installations in museums often took the form of an anthology, a linear progression of work by date, which is one way to present art but not the only. Judd did not see art as being so neat and tidy, and he didn't think that one piece from one artist could accurately reflect that artist's vision. Judd instead wanted to permanently install a large quantity of work from one artist, thus providing an entirely different relationship between the viewer and the work. This way of installing would provide an intense, saturated catalogue of work where the viewer could visually get lost in the richness and quantity of art, and in the space itself. Judd's decision to disassociate himself, physically, from the art world would eventually lead him to Marfa.

In 1946, Judd had written a telegram to his mother from Van Horn, Texas, about 90 miles northwest of Marfa, where he had briefly passed through with the Army.<sup>164</sup> He would say later that he remembered the landscape of west Texas and was fond of it. In 1963 Judd traveled to Tucson to visit his sister, and wrote of his time, "I loved the land around Tucson chiefly because you could see it."<sup>165</sup> Again in 1968 he traveled from Colorado to Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico with his family, and the following year drove throughout Baja California, looking for an open landscape without a lot of people. He wanted land that was "undamaged,"<sup>166</sup> a seemingly impossible feat in the modern day. In 1971, he traveled through the Big Bend, including Marfa, where he rented a house the following summer. In 1973, he began to purchase property in Marfa, the first being two

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<sup>163</sup> Judd, Donald, "In Defense of My Work," *Chinati: The Vision of Donald Judd*. Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation, 2010.

<sup>164</sup> Judd, Donald, "Marfa, Texas," *Chinati: The Vision of Donald Judd*. Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation, 2010.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

former airplane hangars from the old Marfa airport,<sup>167</sup> which had been previously moved into town in the 1930s. The next year he purchased the rest of that property, now known as “the Block,” and built a high adobe wall around the entire space using old adobe blocks from structures that had been torn down.<sup>168</sup> In 1975, Judd became a resident of Texas and began to spend a significant amount of his time in Marfa.

The nature of the Texas sun has imposed on many downtown Marfa buildings the use of dark and opaque glass, or the use of thick butcher paper over interior windows, to block its rays. Judd began using this tactic when he started purchasing property, and although a practical solution to Marfa’s heat, it nevertheless confounds some residents. To the local who has no vested interest in Judd or his art, the tall adobe walls that form “the Block” and the dark windows of his other downtown buildings can message: “Go away.” It is understandable that some locals would not have taken to Judd, or understood his intentions. These physical markers create an additional sense of emptiness that constructs an interior and exterior world, or private and public space. Was Judd establishing himself as an outsider in their world, or was he imposing a new kind of structure on this small community, thus making the local the new outsider? One interviewee said she didn’t know what he was doing but that he must have had something to hide. She referred to Judd’s spaces as “the stores.”<sup>169</sup> In a letter to the editor from a 1999 *Big Bend Sentinel*,<sup>170</sup> one former Marfa resident articulated her distaste for the physical condition of Marfa’s public spaces:

Main street is no longer the focal point of the town, and the beautiful historic courthouse seems to be taken for granted.

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<sup>167</sup> Royce Flying Field, located about where the present-day golf course is.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Marfa native of Hispanic descent. Name withheld.

<sup>170</sup> June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1999, Krista Thornsburg Ackerman in *The Big Bend Sentinel*

But the most disturbing phenomenon to see is all the adobe walls built within the town. The abundance of houses and buildings encased by these walls gives the appearance of secrecy, the appearance of deception, and most of all the appearance of ostracization of an entire town. It is as if the entities involved are saying, “Embrace me but do not come in!”

This local’s opinion is more than valid, and it represents a clashing of cultures that began with Judd’s arrival to Marfa and his subsequent accumulation of property, and continued by incoming residents after his death. Judd was both an outsider and insider to Marfa, and his transformation of space in Marfa perhaps contributed to the natives’ skepticism of his artistic practice.

Between 1978 and 1979, Judd began a partnership with the Dia Foundation that would allow him to purchase more land, with the understanding that he was developing an alternative museum in conjunction with Dia. The Dia Foundation, established in 1974 by Heiner Friedrich and Philippa de Menil, has supported a number of what some would call alternative, often land-based and site-specific art installations in permanent spaces in numerous locations in the United States and abroad.<sup>171</sup> The projects the foundation is interested in are those that cannot obtain sponsorship or support from commercial and private sources because of their nature or scale.<sup>172</sup> Dia supported the creation of Walter de Maria’s *The Lightning Field* in New Mexico, from 1977, and de Maria’s *The Vertical Earth Kilometer* in Kassel, Germany, from the same year. In 1999, Dia acquired Robert

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<sup>171</sup> See [www.diaart.org](http://www.diaart.org) and Gaido Allen, Melissa Susan. *From the Dia to the Chinati Foundation: Donald Judd in Marfa, Texas, 1979-1994*. Thesis. Rice University, 1995.

<sup>172</sup> As quoted in Stockebrand, Marianne, Donald Judd, and Rudi Fuchs. *Chinati: The Vision of Donald Judd*. Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation, 2010.

Smithson's *The Spiral Jetty*, located in Utah's Great Salt Lake. It has also extended its reach to produce web-based art projects, as well as various public programming, not to mention its excellent museum spaces, Dia: Beacon and Dia: Chelsea, as well as various sites around Manhattan.

This early iteration of what we now call the Chinati Foundation was first called the Marfa Project, and later the Art Museum of the Pecos. Through their partnership, Judd and Dia were able to purchase the former Fort D.A. Russell, which was in poor condition, having suffered years of neglect. Together they purchased some 40 buildings and 340 acres of land,<sup>173</sup> and in total Dia invested over \$5 million dollars into the Marfa Project between 1979-1984.<sup>174</sup> However, Judd and Friedrich began to disagree on the path that the museum would take, and Judd wanted more control over the decisions affecting the project.<sup>175</sup> As the result of a legal battle between the artist and the foundation,<sup>176</sup> Judd was able to break his partnership with Dia and keep all of the spaces in Marfa, as well as the art which had been purchased or had its manufacturing paid for, under a new non-profit status and name. It was at this time in 1986 that the Chinati Foundation was born, named for the nearby mountain ranges. Until Judd's death in 1994, he provided all the funding for the Chinati Foundation, which allowed him complete control over its development.

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Gaido Allen, Melissa Susan. *From the Dia to the Chinati Foundation: Donald Judd in Marfa, Texas, 1979-1994*. Thesis, Rice University, 1995.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. For a detailed description of events.

Judd's work in Marfa was slow and studied, and his original plan of housing permanent installations of his work and that of his two friends, John Chamberlain and Dan Flavin, would grow to include in its permanent collection the work of 11 artists. Some of this work was made for Marfa by way of the early in-residence program (essentially Judd inviting his friends and peers to visit and create something) and some of it was purchased or traded by Judd and then permanently installed. Judd's development of space in Marfa was an organic process, building on each purchase and renovation of property and the work of the artists who visited. Judd had a vision, but he did not have a particular timeline of how and when work would be made and installed. In retrospect, Judd's vision of Chinati seems as if it were meticulously laid out from the beginning,<sup>177</sup> but Judd's Marfa project was an ongoing process curated and organized along the way. The success of the Chinati Foundation was in large part due to the work done after his death, when its three staff members<sup>178</sup> were forced to find funding and build an endowment, to find its footing as an institution without the largess of its creator. One can only speculate on Chinati's path had its creator not died. There certainly is an iconic status that has been given to Judd in his death, and this has perhaps allowed the museum to reap the benefits in the form of donations, grants, and media attention.

In 1994, Judd died of lymphoma in New York. The Chinati Foundation is the contemporary museum in Marfa and the Judd Foundation, created in 1996, is in charge of

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<sup>177</sup> Stockebrand, Marianne, Donald Judd, and Rudi Fuchs. *Chinati: The Vision of Donald Judd*. Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation, 2010. Print.

<sup>178</sup> Marianne Stockebrand, Rob Weiner, and Jeffrey Kopie.

his living and work space in both Marfa and 101 Spring Street.<sup>179</sup> These two foundations are separate entities, and can generally be referred to as Judd's public (Chinati) and private (Judd) space. To speak of Marfa is almost always to reference Donald Judd or one of these two foundations, but Marfa's current identity stretches beyond this reach, and in many ways Judd is now a backdrop to Marfa, like an old cathedral.

### **The Chinati Foundation**

If you are used to traditional museums, the Chinati Foundation is a new experience. It is a museum that incorporates the landscape of west Texas and uses the physical structures of its history, Fort D.A. Russell, and perhaps what is most obvious needs repeating: it requires a journey, intention, and commitment on the part of the visitor. This journey to Marfa is inconvenient, but this is what defines a pilgrimage.<sup>180</sup> Through the journey to get there, the space of Marfa becomes place – an intimate, personal experience. This is what Dean MacCannell speaks of when discussing the modern international tourist.<sup>181</sup> There is a collective sense that sights must be seen, that even a personalized journey made by one is never an entirely solo journey. It is a journey made my many, and to make it is to partake in a shared experience that unifies the varied

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<sup>179</sup> While the Chinati Foundation was established during Judd's lifetime, the Judd Foundation was created after many years of organizing his estate after his death. See Butcher, Sterry. "Chinati Foundation Judd's Grand Vision." *The Big Bend Sentinel*(Marfa), February 17, 1994; Butcher, Sterry. "Life After Judd." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa), June 30, 1994; Halpern, Rosario Salgado. "Foundation at Crossroads." *The Big Bend Sentinel*(Marfa), June 30, 1994; "Chinati Art Foundation Evolving into Judd's Vision." *The Big Bend Sentinel*(Marfa), March 31, 1996.

<sup>180</sup> Cousineau, Phil. *Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*. Berkeley, CA: Conari, 2012; Dawson, Jessica. "Exploring Art's Remote Possibilities; Donald Judd Sought a Cultural Vacuum for His Works. In west Texas, He Came Up Empty." *The Washington Post* July 17, 2001.

<sup>181</sup> MacCannell, Dean. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken, 1976.

travelers as one. Despite the fact that each tourist has his or her own specific experience, these experiences are what collectively create the site. The Chinati Foundation is the space, but through the pilgrimage of the tourist, it becomes place. The small, guided tours – the only way to see the space outside of the Open House weekend in October, when you can wander through the spaces unguided and at your own pace - take up most of your day, and can be a physically and emotionally exhausting experience.

The full tour of Chinati<sup>182</sup> starts at 10:00 a.m. and ends at 4:00 p.m., and takes you through every component of the museum, in addition to the rotating temporary show installed at the time of your visit. Between 12:00 and 2:00 p.m. there is a lunch break, which is a good time to take a nap and hydrate. That's four total hours of walking and seeing, where seeing is an active function that takes energy of the mind and body. There is, in essence, a lot to take in. While there is no time limit given – you could arguably stand or sit in a space for as long as you'd like - the group mentality is to keep loosely together, and your guide sets the pace for the tour.

The selections tour is only two hours and takes you through the installations of the three core artists of Chinati: Donald Judd, John Chamberlain, and Dan Flavin (Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4). Either tour is an interesting way to experience art: it is specific, guided, and structured, and their schedules take you through each building at nearly the same time each day. This is important, for most of Judd's work – really, the crux of his aesthetic and design – is that his art is activated by the viewer and by the light's shifting influence on the objects, depending on the sun's position in the sky. Because of the museum's structure, there is a very specific, limited amount of time, at a particular time

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<sup>182</sup> Chinati tours are free to residents of Presidio, Jeff Davis, and Brewster counties. The full tour is \$25 and \$10 for students. The selections tour is \$20 and \$10 for students. The newly available, self-guided tour of the artillery sheds is \$10 and \$5 for students. The outdoor concrete works are freely accessible during museum hours.



of day, in which to experience the art. This creates a hyper-controlled environment that gives the viewer a specific landscape of place in which to view the art. Judd created an alternative museum designed for the art, but in actuality it's probably more structured than any other modern museum space.

### **DONALD JUDD: *15 UNTITLED WORKS IN CONCRETE***

The work that is most successful in terms of working with and for the landscape, not to mention the site's history, is Judd's *15 Untitled Works in Concrete* (Figure 4.5), fabricated by the CRS company in Midland-Odessa over a period of roughly four years.<sup>183</sup> The first thing you notice about these fifteen concrete boxes sitting in a low field on the east side of the Chinati Foundation is that they are bare and plain. As you make your way down one of the narrow footpaths you also begin to realize that they are massive. The best time to view them is, in my opinion, in the late afternoon, because during the summer midday hours the heat and sun can be stifling. During the winter months this is less of a problem. Additionally, depending on when you view them, the boxes' contrast and shadows change, both of which are a central component to experiencing them. Chinati's front gate opens at 9:00 a.m. and closes at 5:00 p.m., and within this time period a visitor is welcome to walk down to these concrete works at no charge.

The works are installed on a roughly north-south line on what was once the fort's polo ground, and as such it is a relatively flat surface that sits lower than the rest of Chinati. Each cluster contains anywhere from two to six concrete boxes, and each cluster is arranged differently, some forming more linear configurations with ninety-degree

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<sup>183</sup> Stockebrand, Marianne, Donald Judd, and Rudi Fuchs. *Chinati: The Vision of Donald Judd*. Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation, 2010.

angles and others forming circular configurations. As is standard with Judd's work, the outer dimensions are consistent but the detail on each piece is varied. Some boxes have open sides at the long end; others have open sides at the short end. Each box is open on at least one side but no more than two. The boxes themselves are 5 meters long and 2.5 meters deep.<sup>184</sup> Each box is symmetrical in its outer use of space, but the difference in each box and in their unique configurations creates a specific place. The simplicity of each form reveals unique aspects as you investigate each piece and each configuration.

As you walk around and in the boxes, you realize how hard it is to fully "see" each piece when too close, a reminder that perspective is just as important as location. At the same time, walking around and in the boxes opens up the surrounding landscape. Here, landscape is a constructed image that requires your attention in order to fully encompass it. The swooshing of cars along Route 67 to the east of the concrete structures places you in an active Marfa, but otherwise the sounds around you are those of nature: the singing of crickets, the scurry of a lizard, the buzzing of a bee, and the gentle breeze against the vegetation. When you step inside a box and move towards its interior, the space becomes a little quieter, unless there is an unseen insect inside whose sounds create a small echo. The temperature inside the box is noticeably cooler, and gives another sensual focus to the experience of the work: the inside and the outside are different spaces.

The concrete is uniform but rough, and there are imperfections in its form due to time and the environment: a tiny gap at one crease, a larger gap at another. These imperfections are perhaps telling: despite Judd's obsession with precision, his work has become decidedly imprecise. Some of the creases allow sunlight into the interior space,

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

giving another contrast between light and dark, inside and outside. The shadows created by the sun have allowed a very specific type of vegetation around each box: the areas of shade provide a richer growth, while the areas that remain outside of any shade are dryer, cracked, harsh.

Walking along this stretch of land, you place the military bunkers and the former artillery sheds in the backdrop of these concrete shapes. The similarity in form is noticeable, and you are left with a very simple architectural space, for the bunkers themselves are cookie-cutter and simple. They represent a structured, formal design and identity that characterize the military, which now serve to characterize the Chinati Foundation. These buildings are architecture at its core: form mixed with function. Judd wrote that his interest in architecture at the Chinati Foundation was secondary, due to the fact that the structures were pre-existing.<sup>185</sup> Later in the same essay, he wrote that he had turned the old structures – referring to the two artillery sheds – *into* architecture. But these *15 Untitled Works in Concrete* are dependent on the environment they surround, which is the environment and architecture of Fort D.A. Russell. In this way they are site-specific.

Site-specific art first emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s and had a close relationship to the environment.<sup>186</sup> Artists were reaching out of the gallery into a tangible landscape that could prompt a different kind of reaction from the viewer. Through this new way of experiencing work, the involvement and *journey* of the viewer was paramount. The various factors of the site are what produce the work. Richard Serra's

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<sup>185</sup> Judd, Donald, "The Chinati Foundation," *Chinati: The Vision of Donald Judd*. Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation, 2010. Print.

<sup>186</sup> See *Art & Place: Site-specific Art of the Americas*. London: Phaidon, 2013; Dempsey, Amy. *Destination Art*. Berkeley: University of California, 2006; Kwon, Miwon. *One Place after Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2002.

*Tilted Arc* of 1981 is an oft-repeated example of a site-specific work, famously dismantled in 1989 after a long battle with the City of New York. From Serra's perspective, it was not possible to move the piece to a different site. "To remove the work is to destroy the work."<sup>187</sup> Judd's installations in Marfa were meant to remain there indefinitely, thereby creating a permanent relationship with the surrounding landscape, as well as solving the problems as he saw with ordinary museums. In this way Judd's work in Marfa can be seen as one massive, site-specific installation.

That Judd's work in concrete is visually aligned with the military architecture of the Chinati Foundation presents an obvious correlation. The bunkers are noticeably lacking in any sort of superfluous design or geometry. They are simple forms that historically served a specific task, and now their present task is also simple. Whether housing soldiers or sculpture, there is a utility of form and purpose in the structures. They are unsophisticated but perfect in their simplicity. The architecture of military design lacks gesture, as does Judd's work. In this way his concrete boxes together form a monument to the military history of Marfa.

#### **DONALD JUDD: *100 UNTITLED WORKS IN MILL ALUMINUM***

The two artillery sheds house Judd's *100 Untitled Works in Mill Aluminum*, 52 in the first building and 48 in the second (Figure 4.6). Each box shares the same outer dimensions, but each box is made unique by the makings of its interior space. You enter and depart each shed on the side, working from the northern side of the field, and Judd's replacement of the garage doors with large glass panels allows an influx of sunlight to activate the space.

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<sup>187</sup> Serra quoted in Kwon, Miwon. *One Place after Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2002.

The artillery sheds are the first things you see on the scheduled tour, and the two buildings make the largest visual footprint on the landscape. Judd had replaced the original flat roofs with barrel shaped metal in an attempt to control leaking, and this transformation doubled the height of each building.<sup>188</sup> (It also failed to solve the leaking.) It is interesting that he felt the need to install such large roofs, for they are entirely unnecessary to the experience of the inside works, and visually make a large stamp on the landscape. You can see them easily from the air, and from many points outside of the immediate grounds of Chinati. In his words, he “made them architecture,”<sup>189</sup> but for the vernacular enthusiast, they were already architecture without his hand. The addition of the barrel roofs also could have been a deliberate attempt to separate the space from its military history – Judd had originally asked the Dia Foundation to fund new construction for his mill aluminum boxes, which was refused.<sup>190</sup> A visitor to the spaces remarked that having a second building with aluminum boxes was just “unnecessary” and just a marker of Judd’s ego.<sup>191</sup>

Despite this exterior scale, the interior space is magical. Chinati regularly offers sunrise and sunset viewings of the sheds, and they have recently added a daily self-guided tour of these two buildings. Viewing these pieces at different times of day allows them to further unravel themselves into objects that allow the light and colors to constantly transform before your eyes. Although each piece is unique, to try to focus on

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<sup>188</sup> Stockebrand, Marianne, Donald Judd, and Rudi Fuchs. *Chinati: The Vision of Donald Judd*. Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation, 2010.

<sup>189</sup> “Nevertheless, in reworking the old buildings, I’ve turned them into architecture.” See his essay “The Chinati Foundation / La Fundación Chinati” from 1987, printed in Stockebrand, Marianne, Donald Judd, and Rudi Fuchs. *Chinati: The Vision of Donald Judd*. Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation, 2010.

<sup>190</sup> Gaido Allen, Melissa Susan. *From the Dia to the Chinati Foundation: Donald Judd in Marfa, Texas, 1979-1994*. Thesis, Rice University, 1995.

<sup>191</sup> Interview with Valerie Arber who had lead the tour where this remark was made.

any one is “like trying to focus on a word in a paragraph in a novel.”<sup>192</sup> Collectively, the reflections of the aluminum create colors and intensities of light that never seem to look the same. In a simple alignment, the boxes seem to grow up and out of the floor, and their shiny and smooth surfaces contrast with the red brick and beige concrete that forms the interior space of the buildings.

Judd’s overarching rubric developed into the stripping away of excessive and unnecessary forms, leaving him with simple shapes based on geometry and math coupled with the decidedly non- or anti-art use of industrial and commercial materials. These pieces are stripped away of excess and gesture, leaving you with only their relationship to the incoming light. To see these works, you almost have to ignore their specific shapes, and impress on yourself that the work does not function without you – the viewer – and the light of the sun. The work, then, is in the experience of place that you undergo when you are in the sheds and moving around the space.

#### **DAN FLAVIN: *UNTITLED (MARFA PROJECT)***

Dan Flavin’s contribution to the Chinati Foundation was a component of Judd’s original design, however it would take about 22 years from concept to completion to see his *untitled (Marfa project)*. Flavin was born in 1933 in Jamaica, New York and died in 1996 at the age of 63. He studied to be a priest but left to join the Air Force, where he was deployed to Korea. He returned to New York in 1956, studying art and immersing himself in the scene.<sup>193</sup> His installation at the Chinati Foundation was initiated in the

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<sup>192</sup> Interview with James Rodewald.

<sup>193</sup> For more bibliographic information see Govan, Michael, Dan Flavin, Tiffany Bell, Brydon Smith, David Gray, and Tiffany Bell. *Dan Flavin: The Complete Lights, 1961-1996*. New York: Dia Art Foundation in Association with Yale Univ., 2004; Flavin, Dan, and Tiffany Bell. *Light in Architecture and Art: The Work of Dan Flavin*. Marfa: Chinati Foundation, 2002; Smith, Roberta. "Dan Flavin, 63, Sculptor Of Fluorescent Light, Dies." *The New York Times* Dec 4, 1996.

1980s, but Dia's financial troubles would presumably contribute to its delay,<sup>194</sup> and then after Judd and Flavin had a falling out, it seemed as if the project might never be completed. It was through the efforts of Marianne Stockebrand, Judd's partner and the director of Chinati for sixteen years,<sup>195</sup> who worked with Flavin shortly before his death, that this "last great art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century"<sup>196</sup> was able to reach completion.

Flavin is known for his use of fluorescent tubing, industrial and limited in colors, to create sculpture and to transform the light in a space. His work at Chinati is the only work in the collection that is artificially lighted (of course, it is its own material of fluorescent tubing that provides the light) and takes up six of the eleven U-shaped bunkers. Using four colors – pink, green, yellow and blue – each installation within a bunker utilizes the U shape to either hide or highlight the tubing upon first entering. The bunkers alternate, so that in the first, third and fifth bunkers, the four elements of tubing are installed in the middle of the bottom U, so that their colors and intensity are not seen until you walk down the arm of the bunker and stand at the corner. In the second, fourth, and sixth bunkers, the tubing is installed at an angle at the corner of the U, so that the intensity of the vertical forms is seen as soon as you enter the space. You cannot walk through each U-shaped building, and instead have to go into each arm individually, so that to view all six bunkers you open and close twelve doors. Most of the windows are no longer functional, but are filled in and recessed (so that their utility is referenced but not accessed), but two windows at the entrance side of each arm allow a modest amount of sunlight into the room.

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<sup>194</sup> Stockebrand, Marianne, Donald Judd, and Rudi Fuchs. *Chinati: The Vision of Donald Judd*. Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation, 2010.

<sup>195</sup> Delahoyde, Steve. "Thomas Kellein Named New Director of Donald Judd's Chinati Foundation." *Media Bistro*. August 10, 2010.

<sup>196</sup> Kimmelman, Michael. "The Last Great Art Of the 20th Century." *The New York Times* 4 Feb. 2001.

The walls of the plain bunkers hide their illuminating interiors. It is in the methodical process of going into and out of each arm, into and out of the sunlight, your eyes adjusting with each entrance and departure that the work comes together into a whole. It is a repetitive process, but it is revealing in the way that the neon interacts with the white walls, and interacts with the other neon, to create new colors and the illusion of color. While you may be alone in one arm, the adjacent one may have people inside, so you may hear the movements and echoes of these bodies unseen. If you are alone in a bunker, the steady pulse of the neon electric light is the only sound available.

Flavin's work in Marfa places you in an artificial space for which the interior is much different than the exterior environment. It is a contrast between natural sunlight and manmade industrial light. Like Judd's boxes, Flavin's fluorescent forms lack reference and gesture. The colors are playful and the deception their combinations offer to the eye builds on this playfulness.

### **JOHN CHAMBERLAIN: *VARIOUS WORKS, 1972-1983***

John Chamberlain was born in 1927 in Rochester, Indiana and died in 2011 at the age of 84. He served in the Navy and studied art at the Art Institute of Chicago and at Black Mountain College, moving to New York in 1957.<sup>197</sup> Although he is known for using automobile scraps to create sculpture, he also worked in foam and other materials at times, and his output of sculpture is displayed directly on the floor or mounted on walls, depending on the size and construction.

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<sup>197</sup> For more bibliographic information see Kennedy, Randy. "John Chamberlain, Who Wrested Rough Magic From Scrap Metal, Dies at 84." *The New York Times*, December 21, 2011; Chamberlain, John, and William C. Agee. *It's All in the Fit: The Work of John Chamberlain : A Symposium Hosted by the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas, April 22-23, 2006*. Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation, 2009.



Chamberlain's installation at Chinati is outside the grounds of Fort D.A. Russell, instead housed in the former Wool & Mohair Company building, just north of the railroad tracks and across from the post office. The interior space is divided into a front room, two middle side rooms, and a large middle and then large back room. Chamberlain's work is characterized by the use of automobile metal, bent and shaped into massive, usually bulbous shapes that contrarily seem delicate in their lightness. In Marfa, 22 of these pieces are grouped together, each a totem to industry. His pieces work best in this space. In other museum settings, when often clustered around dissimilar works, Chamberlain's metal doesn't quite work the way it does in Marfa. In the dedicated space, the occasional passing train interrupts the space of the building by its noise, but this confluence of travel – the active train and the passive, deceased remnants of the automobile – focus the viewer into a place of technology and travel, of speed and power. In the warehouse, speed halts, and power wilts.

Chamberlain's work wasn't built specifically for the space, and in fact many of the artists in the Chinati Foundation's collection did not make their work specifically for Marfa. However, the work is permanently installed in Marfa, allowing a sort of post-site-specificity to the museum as a whole. Other artists represented in the Chinati Foundation are Richard Long, Carl Andre, Ingólfur Arnarsson, Roni Horn, Ilya Kabakov, David Rabinowitch, John Wesley, and Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen. Collectively, Donald Judd curated the works represented, and each work is given its own dedicated space.

## **The Judd Foundation**

The Judd Foundation – established after Judd’s death and whose mission is to “maintain and preserve Donald Judd’s permanently installed living and working spaces, libraries, and archives in New York and Marfa, Texas”<sup>198</sup> – has a process of exploration similar to Chinati’s, wherein you can take a scheduled tour of the Block lasting an hour, or a larger tour of the architecture studio, the art studio, and the Cobb and Whyte houses<sup>199</sup> lasting another ninety minutes. The timing for these two tours is such so that you can take them both on the same day (2:00-3:30 p.m. for the larger tour, 4:30-5:30 p.m. for the Block tour).<sup>200</sup> Again, this is a physically exhausting process. Although the work is engaging and tour groups are kept at a small number, standing and walking in and out of the Texas heat, plus entering stuffy spaces that are often much hotter than the outside, is a trying experience to the visitor. In the winter, the opposite problem of wind and chill meet you. This is all to say that the landscape and environment of Marfa contribute directly to the visitor experience. For someone traveling to Marfa with the intention of touring everything that both the Chinati and Judd Foundations have to offer, a weekend or long weekend visit limits your experience of Marfa to these very specific places. In this way, the art tourist to Marfa is privy to a very narrowed experience of Marfa.

The Block was Judd’s living and working space, designed with symmetry and privacy in mind. The tall adobe wall separates an outside world to a private, interior space, and the interior grounds combine spaces of community (dining tables), relief from climate (a “cement water accumulation pond,”<sup>201</sup> also known to the plebeian as a pool),

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<sup>198</sup> Source: <http://www.juddfoundation.org/generalinformation>

<sup>199</sup> So named for the former owners.

<sup>200</sup> The Studios tour is \$30 and \$15 for students, and the Block tour is \$20 and \$10 for students.

<sup>201</sup> This is what my tour guide referred to the pool as.

and spaces of cultivation and environment (a winter greenhouse and garden space). Judd's house and his two studios occupy much of the square footage. Within his studios are placed some of Judd's earlier works, and many of the pieces are themselves rejects – test pieces that did not meet Judd's standard, but in his private space offered an opportunity for his own contemplation and review.

The other spaces of the Judd Foundation take up many downtown buildings, creating a continuing environment of inside and outside space. Judd, in many ways, had imposed an architectural fury<sup>202</sup> on the space of Marfa, but in so doing he established a place where art, architecture, and day-to-day living come together into one interdependent whole, where the lines between them are less defined. Many of the rooms throughout these Judd spaces contain a bed,<sup>203</sup> which is both sensible and representative. The beds are sensible, because Judd owned a lot of space, and moving in and out of the space could be tiresome. The bed also provided him an opportunity to sit down and be in the space with his work for as long as he chose, and this is a marked contrast to the average experience of the standard museum visitor. The presence of a bed in each space also represents the confluence of private, personal living space with the objects, art or otherwise, that fill them. Judd's work was lived with and lived in, and is what creates the site-specificity of his work in Marfa.

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<sup>202</sup> Lynch, Patrick. "Donald Judd's Architectural Fury." *Architect's Journal*. 24 Nov. 2008. Web. Accessed 2 July 2013.

<sup>203</sup> Judd was also a prolific furniture designer. Although he made a distinction between his art and his furniture, there is a clear aesthetic and philosophical connection between the two.

## Criticism of Judd

Judd's spaces in Marfa are not without criticism. The first Lannan Foundation<sup>204</sup> writer-in-residence in Marfa, Peter Reading, wrote of Judd:

The artist Donald Judd deigned to descend  
here in the 1970s, and proceeded  
(courtesy of vast funding from his patron)  
to launch himself indulgently upon  
a spoilt-child, hedonistic shopping-spree  
procuring half the town.<sup>205</sup>

And on the concrete works, the same writer wrote:

Across the windswept, Pronghorn-browsed brown grass  
Judd's row of concrete, seven-foot-high boxes  
stretches a mile north-south, signifies zilch.<sup>206</sup>

For Reading, the ego of an artist is most noticeable to him as he inspects the installations in the midst of the Marfa landscape. For others, Judd's work was something not readily understood, but I encountered a Marfa native who shared with me her experience with Judd at a time when the concrete works were partially complete.<sup>207</sup>

When Ellen was sixteen, she worked in her dad's repair shop in town. Donald Judd would come in for electrical help and advice, and her dad worked with Judd a number of times to advise him on how best to update the electrical systems in the buildings he had purchased while preserving the integrity of the structures. Ellen admits that she didn't care much for Judd. Here was this weird art guy buying up buildings, and

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<sup>204</sup> The Lannan Foundation is a writer-in-residence program in Marfa that will be discussed in following sections.

<sup>205</sup> Reading, Peter. *Marfan*. Newcastle upon Tyne (England): Bloodaxe, 2000. Print.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> This would have been between 1980 and 1984, though an exact date is unknown.

the adults talked and were skeptical, and all this she overheard and transferred it to create her own skepticism.

One day, Judd was in the store, and he asked her, “Young lady, why do you sneer at me?”

Ellen was busted.

She was also honest.

“I think your art is ugly.”

Judd thought about this, and then asked her father if he could borrow her for a couple of hours. Ellen was terrified. Her father acquiesced, and Judd took Ellen out to the old polo grounds of the former fort where *15 Untitled Works in Concrete* was in an early iteration.

“What do you see?” he asked her.

“I see concrete boxes that are obstructing the view of the landscape.”

They walked down the hill a little. Same question. Same answer.

They walked further down and sat in one of the boxes. And watched, and waited. At some point Ellen’s expression had changed, which Judd noticed.

“What do you see?” Judd asked again.

Ellen responded that she saw amazing shadows, that these shadows were moving, that she finally understood what the concrete boxes had enabled her to see. She understood then that the boxes themselves were not the art. It was the quality of light and shadow that they inspired, that her presence there was activating the work.

She and Judd talked about how she would never again see the sun in that particular place, at that particular time.

Ellen still doesn’t care much for his art – she has never toured the complete collection – but she does understand his perspective.

The very specificity that defines Judd's objects is also what can, perhaps, isolate the viewer. Ellen, for example, wasn't used to seeing dull, concrete boxes as being art, but by spending time with the space, the works became place to her, and she understood Judd's intention. Lacking any visible sign of craft or skill – unless we count the industrial craft of machined objects by paid laborers – the work, when viewed as an object separated from the space it is occupying, can leave the viewer cold. It is not ironic that Marfa's failing economy and emigrating community are what presented Judd with the opportunity to purchase real estate,<sup>208</sup> but it *is* ironic that the qualities that best define his work – their simplicity in both form and composition, that they need only be interesting, that they do not follow any traditionally accepted notion of either painting or sculpture – are also what isolate them. This is why the presence of the work in Marfa, permanently, is integral to an understanding of the work, and of the larger space of Marfa. Marfa is the work, the work is Marfa. They cannot exist without each other.

Art shouldn't have to be easy, in the sense that its meaning is readily apparent, but its theoretical accessibility can make it appealing to a wider audience. To the naked eye, the simplicity of Judd's installations in Marfa might be off-putting to a viewer, depending on his expectations of what art should be. (One local has repeatedly called Judd's work "fascist.") In interviews with locals who were not a fan of Judd's work, a specific definition of art was repeated, over and over: art is painting. Of course, students of art history know that art is much more than just painting. The correlation between class and

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<sup>208</sup> See McIntyre, Tony. "Culture: The Other End of Infinity." *Building Design*. Oct, 2007: 22. McIntyre wrote that it was ironic but it is instead part of the larger story of Marfa, to its rebirth as a place of art and culture instead of becoming a ghost town. I've already described how the military's abandonment of Fort D.A. Russell and the Marfa Army Airfield, as well as the drought of the 1950s caused an exodus of residents from Marfa. The infrastructure of space, in the form of military and historic buildings, is what Judd encountered on his early trips to Marfa in the 1970s. The space was there, unused, and in repurposing the buildings he made it place.

arts consumption has been explored<sup>209</sup> and is directly relevant to the community of Marfa, despite the sensitive nature of the topic. Education and income are both “strongly related to the likelihood of high-arts exposure.”<sup>210</sup> Because Marfa is an economically disadvantaged town for most of its full-time residents, this results in many locals’ disinterest and distaste for the “high brow” collection of the Chinati Foundation and the exhibitions held in other galleries. Another local has noted that in Marfa, “there is not a lot of crossover” between the art community and the Hispanic one, going on to add that “there is not a lot of animosity” despite this. When outsiders consider the presence of discrimination in Marfa, it is really a class and economic distinction amongst its members that they should be looking for.

Apart from locals’ opinions of Judd’s work, does it hold up as we look back on its placement in art history? Judd and his peers – all of whom served in the military – were against such blatant displays of military power, but their strict vocabulary is just as indicative of power. It is a power hidden behind a lack of gesture but perhaps made more apparent by its very materiality and construction. Most of Judd’s work on display in both the Chinati and Judd Foundations is heavy and cumbersome. And the fact that someone else fabricated each piece speaks to the transactions of a capitalist society, and of Judd as an author and a thinker but not a laborer. For some, the work occupies “a special sphere, aloof from politics and commerce and above personal feeling.”<sup>211</sup> Is the focus on the object as non-art somehow depriving it of personality? Greenberg lamented, “Minimal

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<sup>209</sup> DiMaggio, Paul, and Michael Useem. "Social Class and Arts Consumption: The Origins and Consequences of Class Differences in Exposure to the Arts in America." *Theory and Society* 5 (1978): 141-61.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>211</sup> Chave, Anna. "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power." *Arts Magazine* 64.5 (1990): 44-63.

Art remains too much a feat of ideation, and not enough anything else.”<sup>212</sup> Judd’s writing about art shows a philosopher, and an author of ideas that became work at the hand of someone else. It is hard to say which is more valid: the beautiful products of his thinking that can be experienced in Marfa, or the power that these products represent. Either way, they are worth experiencing, and by seeing them in combination with Judd’s private spaces they actually become quite personal.

Still, the spaces of Judd’s Marfa represent a specific component to the town’s identity. Further, apart from docent or intern-led tours, Judd’s private spaces are today without function. They are snapshots of his life, kept intact just as they were when he passed. Whereas in his life, this multitude of space represented an active, compulsive and obsessive order of form, in his death they become places of entombment. These spaces were once alive, and now they are void, and they contain an almost haunting quality of emptiness despite the objects that fill them. This is also, perhaps, the irony of space. If you don’t use it, if it is not functioning on some active level, the space inherently loses a bit of its meaning.

## **Judd and Space**

In Judd’s “Specific Objects” essay of 1965, he describes the “insufficiencies” of both painting and sculpture.<sup>213</sup> The limitation of painting, he says, is that the medium is a two-dimensional object on a flat, square, or rectangular plane, to be set on a wall.

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<sup>212</sup> Greenberg quoted in Chave, Anna. "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power." *Arts Magazine* 64.5 (1990): 44-63.

<sup>213</sup> Judd, Donald. *Complete Writings, 1959-1975: Gallery Reviews, Book Reviews, Articles, Letters to the Editor, Reports, Statements, Complaints*. Halifax, N.S.: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975.



Although painting in his lifetime was working beyond these confines,<sup>214</sup> for Judd this type of historical structure could not move beyond these limitations. The elements of painting – oil and canvas, for instance – were limited by their inherent self-referencing: oil is used by artists and artists paint on canvas. In his use of industrial materials – plexiglass, concrete and aluminum – Judd deleted the reference to art, and to art history’s larger rubric. However, he didn’t delete the reference to the machine and to the industry from which his specific objects are born. Judd was the designer, the architect, the visionary. He put his ideas to paper in the form of simple sketches, and then he worked with contracted and delegated companies to see his ideas come to life. He pushed art in a new direction – one without any markings of his own personality (in that he didn’t actually make the work) by using new materials and new processes. In a search for subjectivity by way of the lack of his own hand in his work, Judd instead carved out an objective place for himself by becoming one of the voices of Minimalism, although he rejected that term.<sup>215</sup>

As for sculpture, Judd said that it was an object that was placed on a pedestal, and this pedestal separated the object’s meaning from the viewer’s relationship with it. “Three dimensions are real space...Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint of a flat surface.”<sup>216</sup> Space is produced, and with his specific objects, Judd produced space.

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<sup>214</sup> Within *Specific Objects* Judd makes note of contemporary artists whom he felt were pushing the boundaries of painting, for instance Frank Stella, Larry Bell, Lee Bontecou. Stella’s shapely canvases defied the tradition of rectangular form in painting, Bell’s use of industrial glass and plexi challenged traditional notions of sculpture and Bontecou’s sculpture nearly reads as 3-D painting, a monochromatic sculpture within a rectangular, painting-like format.

<sup>215</sup> Judd did not agree with the term “minimalism” and instead chose to see himself as an empiricist. However, he is commonly referred to as a minimalist artist in the context of modern art history.

<sup>216</sup> Judd, Donald. *Complete Writings, 1959-1975: Gallery Reviews, Book Reviews, Articles, Letters to the Editor, Reports, Statements, Complaints*. Halifax, N.S.: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975. Print.

If sculpture and painting cannot exist without the inherent reference to their medium, can anything exist as a pure form in itself? If Judd's objects, made specific by their geometry and placement, are not referencing a larger history of art, to what are they referring? Can an object exist in space simply and purely? If landscape, following Cosgrove,<sup>217</sup> cannot exist without its reference to power, economy, and society, and if space, following Lefebvre,<sup>218</sup> is produced, how can we separate out the inherent interrelationships between the myriad causal and resultant meanings associated with landscape and space? How can Judd's objects lack reference to power, economy or society, and how are they not specifically produced?

In 2010, the Judd Foundation made available online Judd's entire 10,000-volume library. The website displays pristinely photographed images that take you on a virtual tour of the library space, and each image can then be zoomed in on for closer inspection. By doing so one can see what other volumes surround particular texts. One may also search the collection by subject, author, or title, providing a scholar of Judd an entirely new opportunity for understanding his mindset (The Judd Foundation remains closed to researchers because it is, according to its staff, still organizing and archiving material, nearly twenty years after the artist's death).

It is a curious thought to think of Judd's concept of space in relation to the geographer's concept of space and place. I wondered what geographers, if any, Judd had read during his lifetime, and if they made their way into Judd's library, either before or after his treatise, "Specific Objects." Here is what is not included in his library: Yi Fu Tuan, David Harvey, Mark Augé, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Carl Sauer. The

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<sup>217</sup> Cosgrove, Denis E. *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1998. Print.

<sup>218</sup> Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Oxford, OX, UK: Blackwell, 1992. Print.

texts of geographic interest in his library are these: John Brinkerhoff Jackson – *The Southern Landscape Tradition in Texas* (1980), *American Space* (1972); Paul Virilio – *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* (1980); Gaston Bachelard – *The Poetics of Space* (1964). Having studied philosophy, Judd’s library has a healthy amount of philosophers represented (484 books on the subject) including the following: Martin Heidegger – *Being and Time* (1962), *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1965); G. W. F. Hegel – *On Art, Religion and Philosophy* (1970), and *Introduction to Aesthetics* (1979).

If Judd had been familiar with J.B. Jackson’s writing on landscape, then he was aware of how humans have a direct hand in shaping the landscape that surrounds them, and that this landscape – no matter how simple, or mundane – is actually quite rich with detail. He would have potentially looked at Marfa as a landscape of simplicity that actually revealed the beauty of small American towns. Further, in reading Bachelard he could have made the connection between public and private space, and how our interactions in private space – specifically the space of our homes – are integral to the rest of our experiences with the exterior world. Home is important for Bachelard, just as it is for Judd. This, again, is revealed as you walk through his private spaces in Marfa.

Following Bachelard,<sup>219</sup> the private spaces of Judd in Marfa are more than just living spaces. The space of our homes is the first universe we know, and the layout of these spaces and the practical objects within them define our intimate experiences there. Why do we spend so much energy and time in creating and caring for our homes? Why does a hotel room always feel so stale? Why did Judd constantly move around his furniture and art to rework the spaces that he occupied, in a search for getting it *just right*? We know how important our personal spaces are, whether or not we can articulate

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<sup>219</sup> Bachelard, Gaston, and M. Jolas. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon, 1994.

why. The inclusion of art into a space gives the entire room more meaningful substance, and the art relates to the chair, which relates to the desk, which relates to the window. “An artist does not create the way he lives, he lives the way he creates.”<sup>220</sup>

Being able to see the private spaces of Judd offers us insight into his philosophy, and the relationship between these spaces and his work are clear. The catalogue of his work – referred to as boxes, stacks and progressions – is ordered, simple, and methodical. His bedrooms, kitchens, and studios are the same. Further, the line that separates the two spaces – work and living, art and life – is no longer a clear division. Judd’s life is his work, and his work is his life. This is evidenced as you take a tour of the studios or the Block and see how interwoven his art is to his everyday life. It softens Judd the creator into Judd the human.

Realizing that the links I am making are entirely speculation, I maintain that the issues of art, architecture, geography, philosophy, anthropology and history are all related, particularly in relation to Judd. That he has these aforementioned texts in his library at least somewhat implies that he had read them.<sup>221</sup> What I propose is that Judd’s interest and knowledge in these philosophical areas contributed to his specific writing on art and architecture. Essentially, art cannot be removed from life, placed on a pedestal, and treated as an object alone in the world. And Judd’s criticism of the traditional museum describes this. Art is a living history and it exists in living spaces, not stale museum settings. Judd’s work in Marfa is the culmination of this idea.

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<sup>220</sup> Jean Lescure quoted in Bachelard, Gaston, and M. Jolas. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon, 1994.

<sup>221</sup> Although many of the books in his library remain unopened, or their spines unbroken, signifying his intention of creating a reference library or catalogue of information regardless of whether or not he had any intention of reading them. When considered with the amount of spaces Judd occupied in Marfa, in addition to the amount of objects contained within them, it leads me to believe that Judd was actually quite a hoarder.

Judd wrote that there was unfortunately little concern for old buildings in American towns and cities.<sup>222</sup> Buildings were not built to last, and they were easily torn down in order to build something new. There was no respect for the history of place, as evidenced by the physical structures that comprised this place. His transformation of the buildings in Marfa would seem to support his belief that pre-existing structures should be worked *with* – even at the cost beyond that of new construction<sup>223</sup> – and that untouched land should remain untouched. However, he also gutted buildings to the bare bones. Was he perhaps erasing history and not revealing it? Despite the credit often given to him as an architectural and landscape preservationist, Judd did want to construct new buildings at Fort D.A. Russell, having initially found the place to be “a wreck.”<sup>224</sup> He wrote that, were he to do it all over, “new buildings would have been better,”<sup>225</sup> but this conflicts with his ideology of preservation.

As the space of the Chinati Foundation stands now, however, I cannot imagine anything but what is presented to me: the refurbished and repurposed use of old space. Judd, simply, would contradict himself in his writing, a trait not unique to him. The contradictions show an active mind, constantly engaged with his ideas and with his projects in search of something complete and pure.

Judd’s spaces of Marfa go beyond any structured notion of art, place, and architecture. Even with his simple furniture designs<sup>226</sup> he has brought art into the

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<sup>222</sup> Judd, Donald, “Marfa, Texas” *Chinati: The Vision of Donald Judd*. Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation, 2010.

<sup>223</sup> Judd, Donald. *Complete Writings, 1959-1975: Gallery Reviews, Book Reviews, Articles, Letters to the Editor, Reports, Statements, Complaints*. Halifax, N.S.: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975.

<sup>224</sup> Judd, Donald, “Arena” *Chinati: The Vision of Donald Judd*. Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation, 2010.

<sup>225</sup> Judd, Donald, “Marfa, Texas” *Chinati: The Vision of Donald Judd*. Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation, 2010.

<sup>226</sup> Judd was also a designer of furniture and his pieces are still produced by the Judd Foundation.

everyday. To see the vision of Donald Judd is not to see one object, or a collection of objects in a room. Although a specific focus of Marfa's identity – there are still countless natives who have never toured the Chinati or Judd Foundations, or any of the other gallery spaces, and have no interest in doing so – Judd's spaces of Marfa have placed Marfa in a very specific, arts-focused frame of mind. That the attention given to Marfa is often focused on this arts identity is not an insult to the locals;<sup>227</sup> instead it is a product of the town's recent history. Marfa's popularity is so heavily focused on the arts that this is often what drives writers and journalists to visit. If anything, the locals can take comfort in knowing that *their* Marfa is much more complex than any article could make out to be. In this way, their Marfa remains somewhat protected.

### **Post Judd**

About a year after Judd's death, art critic Roberta Smith pondered the future of Marfa and of the Chinati Foundation.<sup>228</sup> "If Marfa is preserved and becomes accessible to the public," she wrote, Chinati "will become one of the most substantial single-artist museums in the world."<sup>229</sup> Marfa has become this accessible place, and Chinati has lived up to Smith's proposal, but this was no overnight sensation. The development of Marfa has come at the hands of various players who built on the work of previous newcomers and locals. In this way the development of Marfa continues to morph with each year, with each business, and with each local who makes his own contribution in whatever form that takes.

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<sup>227</sup> The criticism as I understand it and as told to me throughout various interviews, is that the outside world focuses on the art-ness of Marfa, despite the fact that not all residents of Marfa have anything to do with the art.

<sup>228</sup> Smith, Roberta. "The World According to Judd." *The New York Times*, February 26, 1995.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

The Chinati Foundation's associate director, Rob Weiner, estimates that they received 11,000 visitors in 2011,<sup>230</sup> more than double the estimate of visitors to the museum in 1995.<sup>231</sup> (Curiously, the Judd Foundation currently estimates only 2,500 visitors a year.)<sup>232</sup> By comparison, the Louvre is the world's busiest museum, with 8,500,000 annual visitors.<sup>233</sup> Meanwhile the Marfa Visitor Center, located in the USO building, estimates about 4,600 visitors a year walk through its doors – and these visitors come to Marfa for all types of reasons, not only for the art. The visitor numbers have increased as Marfa's exposure to the outside world has increased, and the cultural institutions that have infiltrated Marfa since Judd's death have contributed to this growth. A review of incoming residents and new businesses can narrate and explain the development of Marfa over the last twenty years.

Tim Crowley, the "patron saint"<sup>234</sup> of Marfa, first traveled there to attend Chinati's Open House in 1991.<sup>235</sup> He had gone to law school with a friend and Marfa native, Pablo Alvarado, who also owns a home there and had invited him to visit. Tim and his then-wife Lynne were drawn to the landscape of Marfa, and they were also art aficionados – Lynne owned a gallery in Houston. At this time, Marfa's real estate was dirt cheap, and Tim and Lynne were attracted to the landscape and opportunity they encountered. Theirs was not unlike Judd's opportunity in the early 1970s: real estate was cheap, businesses were shuttered, and no one else was buying.

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<sup>230</sup> Ulaby, Neda, writer. "Marfa, Texas: An Unlikely Art Oasis In A Desert Town." NPR. August 2, 2012.

<sup>231</sup> Butcher, Sterry. "Chinati Foundation Sees Rise in Visitors by Educators, Classes." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa), March 23, 2000.

<sup>232</sup> Source: Caitlin Murray of the Judd Foundation.

<sup>233</sup> *The Art Newspaper* (London). "Exhibition and Museum Attendance Figures 2010." April 2011.

<sup>234</sup> Barnes, Michael. "West to Marfa for New Year's Eve." January 4, 2012.

<http://www.austin360.com/news/entertainment/arts-theater/west-to-marfa-for-new-years-eve-1/nRjSc/>.

<sup>235</sup> Interview with Tim Crowley, 2012.

Tim and Lynne ultimately purchased dozens of properties, and they would encourage their friends to come visit and to also purchase real estate. What is significant about the work of Tim and Lynne is that they financially invested in Marfa's infrastructure, which is something that Judd had failed to do. While Judd's interest in Marfa was in renovating his own spaces, Tim and Lynne worked beyond the borders of their home to contribute to everyone in the community by way of public spaces and local businesses. Judd had at one point been the largest employer in Marfa,<sup>236</sup> and he was interested in harvesting local resources to create jobs and build community (he wanted to bottle and sell local spring water and was interested in starting a farmer's market for local vendors to sell their homemade goods),<sup>237</sup> but these plans never came to fruition. Tim and Lynne, however, opened the Crowley Theater, the Marfa Book Company, and were original investors in renovating the Thunderbird Hotel, among other ventures. Tim's brother, son, and mother all currently live in Marfa.<sup>238</sup>

Tim also lent his plot of land on the southwest side of the railroad tracks on South Highland Avenue to the city and built what locals refer to as "the shade structure" in 2007. The Judd Foundation matched his donation by allowing him to choose styles of Judd-designed furniture for the space, which were then commissioned and built locally. Tim is neither a geographer nor a philosopher, but there is a geographical sensibility in his decision not to formally name this space in any particular way, as he knew that its uses would be varied. There is no name because the space changes. The shade structure is used for the weekly farmer's market and is where the Food Truck parks during lunch hours. Its large, shaded space offers midday breaks from the sun and its central location

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<sup>236</sup> Various sources say he employed between 20-63 people throughout the years.

<sup>237</sup> As told to me by locals Robert and Valerie Arber.

<sup>238</sup> Tim and Lynne also divorced in 2008, so any future use of Tim's name only is deliberate.



offers an excellent gathering point for the community. It is also nice to be able to sit on and use the Judd benches and tables, as it offers another avenue into his work. Whereas the spaces of both Chinati and Judd are “hands-off,” the outdoor pieces at the shade structure are usable, practical, and unique to Marfa.

In 1999, Tim and Lynne opened the Marfa Book Company and later added a coffee and wine bar<sup>239</sup> to the space. It provided an opportunity for locals and visitors to engage with each other, and this kind of interaction remains an important part of the community. Locals name the opening of this store and its coffee bar in particular as central to the development of community in Marfa. It was the unofficial meeting point, not unlike the post office, and it encouraged extended periods of gathering to its patrons. Tim sold the bookstore to local Tim Johnson (a former Chinati intern who chose to stay in Marfa after his internship ended) who continued to develop community events by hosting Lannan Foundation writers’ and artists’ talks, and he regularly partners with the other local foundations to develop and host programming.

In 2001, the Crowley Theater was opened in the large space of a former feed store, and is free for use by non-profit organizations. In 2000, the Dan Flavin installation, *untitled (Marfa Project)*, was finally completed at the Chinati Foundation. Although this would not be the last work to be permanently installed in the museum,<sup>240</sup> it did mark the conclusion of a dialogue that had begun in 1979 between Judd and Flavin<sup>241</sup> and is one of the cornerstone pieces of the museum. Further, Michael Kimmelman’s glowing review of

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<sup>239</sup> Which was unfortunately short lived – the coffee and wine bar has since been removed.

<sup>240</sup> The John Wesley gallery opened in 2004.

<sup>241</sup> Butcher, Sterry. "Flavin Installation Completes Judd's Vision for Chinati." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa), October 5, 2000.

the work<sup>242</sup> focused more attention on the small town that was steadily becoming more and more an arts mecca.

Other incoming residents throughout the 1990s were Dick DeGuerin, a criminal defense attorney based in Houston (and who defended Playboy in the *Playboy Marfa* spectacle detailed in Chapter 7), the artist Charles Mary Kubricht of Houston and New York, the artist Mary Shaffer, and the accountant Lineaus Lorette, who also makes medicine leather balls. As best articulated in the weekly paper, “the future economic force driving this ranching community will be art-related.”<sup>243</sup> These are just a few of the diverse new residents who brought a surge of life and activity to Marfa during the 1990s.

Charles Mary’s work in particular has been based on her experience of the landscape in Marfa. She looks for “what is hidden in the landscape” and studied military tracking manuals to develop her own seeing skills, often hiking with Border Patrol trackers to practice her optical exercises and learn from their methods. Her work, like Judd’s, also asks of the viewer an essential component to seeing the work: movement. But while Judd’s philosophy stresses permanence, Charles Mary’s work is anything but. A 2011 installation at the bookstore’s gallery (Figure 4.7) covered the walls and ceiling with painted black and white, geometric shapes. Inspired by dazzle camouflage, which was a painting technique used on ships during World War I,<sup>244</sup> “The Figure is Always Ground” is unsettling and transformative.

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<sup>242</sup> Kimmelman, Michael. "The Last Great Art Of the 20th Century." *The New York Times*, February 4, 2001.

<sup>243</sup> Halpern, Rosario Salgado. "Artisans Acquiring Marfa Properties." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa), July 3, 1997.

<sup>244</sup> A tangent here but fascinating in its own right. See Behrens, Roy R. *Ship Shape, a Dazzle Camouflage Sourcebook: An Anthology of Writings about Ship Camouflage during World War One*. Dysart, IA: Bobolink Books, 2012.

In 1997, the Lannan Foundation, “dedicated to cultural freedom, diversity and creativity through projects which support exceptional contemporary artists and writers,”<sup>245</sup> began purchasing houses in Marfa with the intention of starting a writer-in-residence program. By 2001, they were renovating a third house and had purchased two more,<sup>246</sup> and in 2002 they purchased a sixth house.<sup>247</sup> To date the Lannan Foundation has supported approximately 237 artists and writers in residence in Marfa.<sup>248</sup> The Chinati Foundation’s residency program, started by Judd, has housed 134 artists since 1989.<sup>249</sup> Fieldwork: Marfa is a newer residency program run jointly by two foreign schools, ESBA Nantes Métropole and HEAD-Genève, and is “dedicated to the practice of art in public space, critical approaches to landscape and artistic projects based on field investigation methods.”<sup>250</sup> This residency program most recently drew 220 applications from 37 countries, which shows how expansive Marfa’s cultural placement is.

There are, in essence, always a number of people in Marfa who are temporarily there in order to produce work. Whether they are inspired specifically by the landscape or just in need of space and time itself, the place of Marfa directly contributes to the output of artists and writers. And as these artists and writers take their work and experience to their home cities, they take a piece of Marfa with them, disseminating its culture and marketing Marfa to outsiders.

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<sup>245</sup> Source: <http://www.lannan.org/about/>

<sup>246</sup> Butcher, Sterry. "Lannan Foundation Program Grows with House Purchases." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa), May 3, 2001.

<sup>247</sup> Butcher, Sterry. "Lannan Foundation Purchases Sixth Marfa House." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa), January 31, 2002.

<sup>248</sup> For a complete list of past residents, see <http://www.lannan.org/residency/past/>. Although mainly host to writers, the Lannan Foundation has also periodically hosted artists and translators.

<sup>249</sup> For a complete list of past residents, see <http://chinati.org/programs/artists-in-residence>.

<sup>250</sup> Source: <http://www.fieldworkmarfa.org/node/2>

Other foundations followed suit after the Lannan Foundation's establishment. The International Woman's Foundation was established in the former officers' quarters of Fort D.A. Russell in 2002 with the intention of supporting female artists.<sup>251</sup> Ballroom Marfa<sup>252</sup> opened in 2003 as a contemporary arts and culture space.<sup>253</sup> Besides visual exhibitions, Ballroom Marfa produces film and music events as well as various interdisciplinary symposiums, and they are currently working on a project to build a drive-in theater in Vizcaino Park, on the eastern part of town. The Ayn Foundation, which is "committed to comprehensive, large-scale projects by major international artists for presentation to the public,"<sup>254</sup> opened its Marfa galleries in 2005, and its two galleries permanently display Andy Warhol's *The Last Supper* and Maria Zeres' *September Eleven*. With a bit of tongue-in-cheek humor, the aptly named Pizza Foundation opened in 2002 to feed all the hungry arts tourists.

Before the opening of a handful of Marfa restaurants over the past ten years, the only place available to eat on a Sunday evening was inside the Stripes gas station.<sup>255</sup> That changed with the opening of Jett's Grill, Maiya's, Cochineal, Pizza Foundation and Food Shark, as well as the coffee-producing Squeeze Marfa and Frama, all of which opened between 2002 and 2008. Now it is possible to get a \$32 steak, paired with a \$16 glass of wine, but who is the consumer? It is the tourist and only some locals who spend this kind of money on dining. While restaurateur Maiya Keck was vocal about her targeted demographic (tourists), other business owners actively sought out local opinion: Dan and

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<sup>251</sup> Butcher, Sterry. "New Group Will Renovate Building, Serve Women Artists." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa), July 3, 2002.

<sup>252</sup> Disclaimer: the author interned with Ballroom Marfa during the summer of 2011.

<sup>253</sup> Butcher, Sterry. "Marfa's Newest Cultural Space Offers Alternative Scene." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa), April 22, 2004.

<sup>254</sup> Source: <http://www.aynfoundation.com/about.html>

<sup>255</sup> As told to me by Tim Crowley.

Jesse Browning, owners of Frama Coffee and Tumbleweed Laundry, asked the community what kind of business they were in need of. When locals responded that a laundromat was needed, they listened.

In 2006, Marfa Public Radio, an NPR affiliate, started filling the airwaves with music and dialogue.<sup>256</sup> This has become another way for a local or tourist to engage with the community, and a way for outsiders to reach Marfa when not physically present. In 2009, Padre's Marfa opened in what used to be a funeral home, and this venue has a steady flow of musicians through its doors. Playing a show in Marfa "is a mixed blessing for touring musicians."<sup>257</sup> The crowds are small, but the significance of playing in Marfa gives a particular amount of credibility and coolness. Like an artist who participates in a residency or exhibition in Marfa, the boost to a musician's CV speaks volumes, and associating oneself to Marfa in this way is a form of cultural capital. Padre's also offers a democratic venue for natives and tourists alike to gather in a simple but fun, unassuming way. (Live music, moon pies, Lone Star draft and red beans and rice is delightfully about as unassuming as you can get). One former resident said that the opening of both the Frama/Tumbleweed and Padre's "improved town relations" through their unassuming and simple functions. As one local noted, "If Padres wasn't here I wouldn't go over there and drink beer, but it is, so I do." Amen to that.

Despite the quantity of work being exhibited in Marfa among these various cultural foundations, it is surprising how often the topics exhibited or discussed qualitatively have nothing to do with Marfa's location or identity. The magnificent

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<sup>256</sup> Although MPR encountered trouble with the FCC and were off the air from February 2006 to September 2007.

<sup>257</sup> Langer, Andy. "Tiny, Remote Marfa Poised to Be a Rock--Star Magnet." *The New York Times*, October 1, 2011.

opportunity created by these foundations is an exploration of local, relevant topics, such as water, sustainability and the border, and it is these exhibits and events that contribute most significantly to the placing of Marfa in contemporary culture.

One example is the Marfa Dialogues, a series of discussions and events put on by Ballroom Marfa. The first Marfa Dialogues was in 2010 and focused on issues of the border, the second Marfa Dialogues in 2012 focused on climate change and sustainability. The most recent Marfa Dialogues of 2013 focused again on climate change, environmental activism and artistic practice.<sup>258</sup> These symposiums provide an opportunity for artists, scholars and activists, and the setting for critical discussion and open dialogues. Another example is the exhibition, "Treading Water" of 2005, also hosted by Ballroom Marfa. The exhibition was accompanied by performances and lectures that focused on the issue of water, a particularly relevant topic to Marfa.

In 2003, the Thunderbird Hotel was purchased and closed for renovations. Its patron, Liz Lambert, had already become somewhat famous for her restoration of the Hotel San Jose on South Congress Avenue in Austin. (She has been credited for jumpstarting a rejuvenation of residents and tourists to the once-desolate neighborhood.)<sup>259</sup> In 2005, the Thunderbird reopened, and in 2006, Liz's next project in Marfa, El Cosmico, broke ground. Lambert happens to be from west Texas and comes from ranching heritage. Perhaps it is this personal history that made her influence on Marfa especially fitting, because she understood the challenges of the landscape. El Cosmico is hard to describe. It is an alternative, fluid campground, and the spaces to rent are yurts, teepees, and refurbished vintage trailers. Her goal with El Cosmico is to

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<sup>258</sup> From the various press releases for Ballroom's Marfa Dialogues series.

<sup>259</sup> Kelso, Stirling. "Four Hotels With Spice, Allure and the Liz Lambert Touch." *The New York Times*, March 26, 2011.

explore “how to interact with the land gently,”<sup>260</sup> and she views the site as a place of continual change and experimentation.

The restoration of the Thunderbird as well as the planning of El Cosmico allowed for Liz’s collaboration with designers and students.<sup>261</sup> Joey Benton, a Marfa local who had originally moved there with Maiya Keck to catalogue Judd’s estate in 1994, helped to design and build the interior spaces. Jamey Garza and his wife Constance, who had designed furniture for the Hotel San Jose, were also invited to design furniture for the Thunderbird and moved to Marfa in 2003. While Jamey and Constance had originally planned to work on the project and then move on, they ended up staying in Marfa.

The more you get to know Marfa, the easier it is to understand how Joey, Jamey, and Constance have been kept busy with their custom design work. Between the new restaurants and businesses that have opened (and closed) and the increase in home renovations, there continues to be a market for the work of these designers. It is by designing and building furniture locally in Marfa that, through the past ten and twenty years, these designers have contributed to the style of Marfa. Even more so today, Jamey and Constance have expanded outside of Marfa to market and sell their work (under the name Garza Furniture Design and Textiles by Constance, Figure 4.8) in other cities and can be found in stores in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Seattle, and Austin. Joey’s business, Silla (Spanish for “chair,” Figure 4.9) continues to produce furniture and custom work in Marfa as well as being exported to other cities, and their pieces sell for hundreds (and thousands) of dollars.

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<sup>260</sup> "Liz Lambert." *Texas Monthly*, February 2008.

<sup>261</sup> Liz Lambert presented her El Cosmico project to a 2006 UT Austin real estate management course taught by Steve Ross. Other UT Austin classes have contributed to design projects.

Despite the restorations of both the Hotel Paisano and Thunderbird Hotel, there remain limited housing options in Marfa for the temporary visitor. Between the five hotels<sup>262</sup> in Marfa, there are only 98 rooms, and during any number of busy weekends the rooms sell out quickly in advance. The housing issue is worse if you want to live in Marfa. Those who work in Marfa – at the Village Farms hydroponic tomato farm, for Presidio County, or for the Border Patrol – have limited options when it comes to rent. Most second home owners would rather hedge their bets by using sites like Airbnb or VRBO to rent out their spaces, and they charge anywhere from \$150 to \$350 per night. A studio or one-bedroom in Marfa will run you about \$700 per month, which is unaffordable to most residents. Many Border Patrol agents commute from Fort Davis or Alpine, and buying a home is simply not an option for many locals.

Some have tried, and failed, to create more housing in Marfa. In 2005, the then-open American Plume and Feather factory attempted to build an 88-unit subdivision on its property just south of town, which was heavily fought by Marianne Stockebrand of the Chinati Foundation. The community was divided into two groups: those who wanted to conserve the landscape, and those who wanted to see more housing made available. Those who hate Judd's *15 Untitled Works in Concrete* at the Chinati Foundation threw Marianne's defense of the landscape back in her face. The concrete pieces, says one local, "are purposely alien to the environment"<sup>263</sup> and are no different than a proposed subdivision in its impact on the aesthetic pleasures of Marfa's landscape.

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<sup>262</sup> The Hotel Paisano has 41 rooms, The Thunderbird Hotel has 24 rooms, The Riata Inn has 20 rooms, El Cosmico has 8 rooms between its 8 trailers, yurts and teepees but a large camping ground, and the Arcón Inn has five rooms.

<sup>263</sup> From a Letter to the Editor in the January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2005 newspaper.



Local residents have voiced their disapproval of the changes in housing, as each restored and flipped home brings with it rising property taxes.<sup>264</sup> Figure 7.4 shows the increase in property value in Marfa from 1998 to 2010. As Marfa's popularity has increased, so have the taxes and appraisal value for residences. When viewed in combination with the growth in events and media attention to Marfa, there is a noted correlation between everything. Marfa's popularity through its steady calendar of cultural productions has placed it in the minds of tourists and outsiders, which in turn has contributed to its changing economy.

It is understandable that Marfa locals want affordable housing and convenient access to shopping and services. But is building a subdivision or putting in a Wal-Mart (which has been proposed) on Marfa's existing open space going to add more than it would subtract from Marfa's beauty? This is not an easy question to answer because it is entirely dependent on personal opinion and priorities. If this type of infrastructure were to arise, however, then the landscape of Marfa would change, and eventually – slowly but surely – the attraction to Marfa would diminish, because the very place of Marfa would change. The success of Marfa's development in the last twenty years is the result of “a careful preservation of the past while insisting on the highest standards for the future.”<sup>265</sup> And while community members may not always agree with these high standards, they are necessary for the preservation of the very fabric that defines Marfa. The alternative, for many natives, is a Marfa that was not affected by Judd, not affected by the cultural changes after Judd. A Marfa without Judd or his disciples, however, is a ghost town.

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<sup>264</sup> Wheelock, Monica. "Art Transforming Texas Desert Town into Cultural Oasis." *University Wire*, October 9, 2007.

<sup>265</sup> Barnes, Michael. "There's More to Marfa than Mysterious Lights and Vibrant Arts Scene." *Austin-American Statesman*, March 25, 2008.

## **Conclusion**

Donald Judd's formation of the Chinati Foundation took over twenty years and allowed him to develop his ideas on life and art in a landscape far removed from the art world. Since his death, the museum of his creation and the estate that manages his personal spaces have built on his philosophical and artistic foundations, carving out a place for Judd's legacy in a global cultural network that continues to draw visitors to Marfa, making the town an arts mecca. To experience the places of the Chinati and Judd Foundations is to experience a particular kind of Marfa, and a steady calendar of cultural programming from these and other foundations and businesses continues to draw visitors.

Incoming residents in the last twenty years have also affected Marfa's culture and economy by opening new restaurants, hotels, and other businesses that contribute to and support the modern identity of Marfa. Today, culture is synonymous with the name Marfa, and while this culture has expanded beyond Judd's influence, it remains ultimately reliant on his historic significance. Having said that, Marfa is no longer about Judd, and some newcomers to Marfa may have no knowledge of his work in Marfa. They come for other reasons now – to work at the radio station, perhaps, or to retire to the beautiful landscape and enjoy the pleasures of small-town life – and their influence over the past twenty years has contributed to the sustainability and identity of Marfa.

The new factors of Marfa's culture have also contributed to increased property values, taxes and higher rents, which create in the community varying opinions on how best to alleviate what is a financial burden to some. The success of Marfa as a place of interest has also created its challenges, but a Marfa without its cultural foundations, their programming, and the media attention that accompanies this is perhaps a desolate community. Marfa's future will continue to be reliant on its growing economy of tourism,

but also the balance that its community members can manage between this and their own needs as a small town.



Figure 4.1: Modern aerial view of the Chinati Foundation, from [chinati.org](http://chinati.org)



Figure 4.2: 2011 interior view of one artillery shed, by author





Figure 4.3: 2011 interior view of the John Chamberlain building, by author



Figure 4.4: 2011 interior view of one arm of Dan Flavin's (untitled) *Marfa Project*, by author



Figure 4.5: View of *15 Untitled Works in Concrete* from 2013, by author





Figure 4.6 Exterior view of one artillery shed in 2013, by author

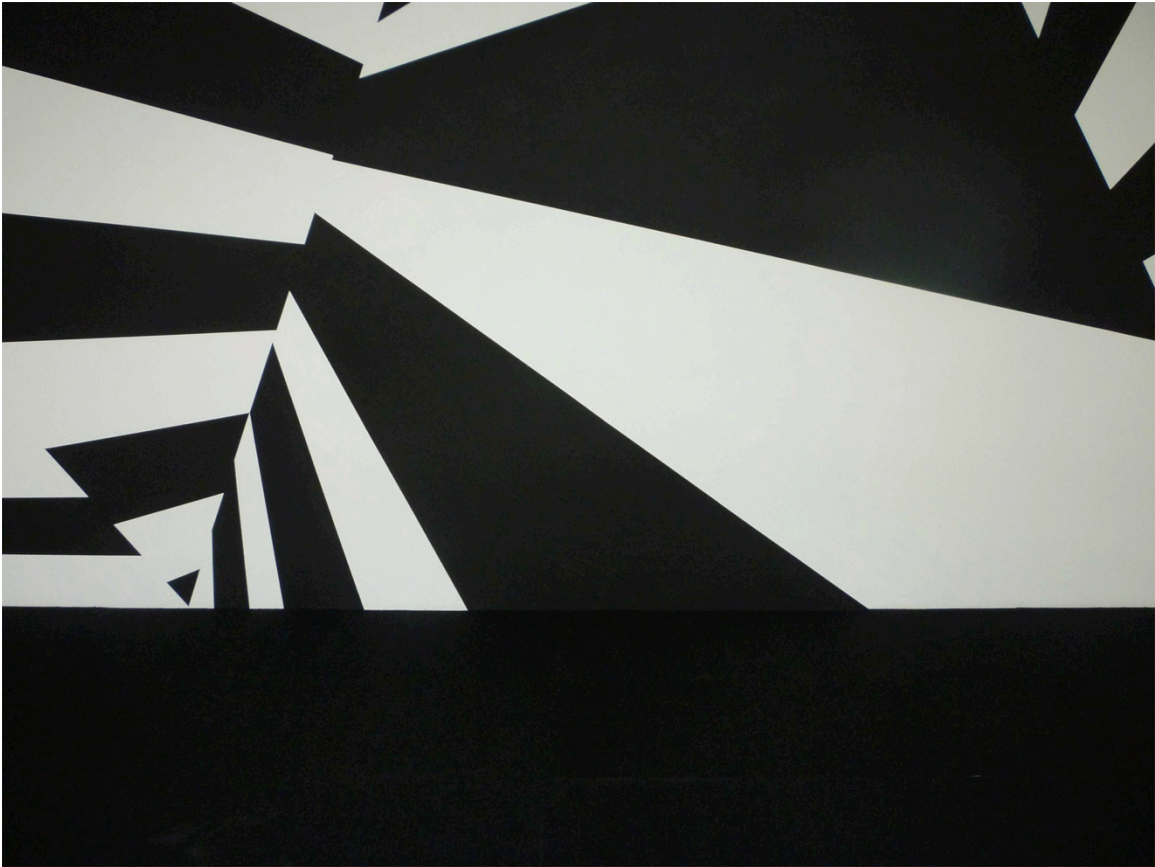


Figure 4.7: View of Charles Mary Kubricht's "The Figure is Always Ground" at the Marfa Book Company, from [marfabookco.com](http://marfabookco.com)



Figure 4.8: Promotional postcard showing interior of Garza Furniture Design in Marfa



Figure 4.9: Joey Benton's FlipFlop chair, from [sillamarfa.com](http://sillamarfa.com)

## **CHAPTER 5: TOURISM IN MARFA**

In the twenty years since Donald Judd's death Marfa has become more and more of a tourist destination by way of its arts and cultural programming. Even before it was known as an arts mecca, however, Marfa was also an attraction to nature enthusiasts, pilots, and Marfa Mystery Lights seekers. In this chapter I will briefly review the history of tourism as it relates to Marfa's landscape, in addition to the concept of the tourist gaze and the authentic experience. I will look at how the various cultural productions in Marfa create the experience of place and contribute to an economy of tourism, and in particular explore the fascination with the Marfa Mystery Lights. I will then focus on the placing of Marfa through various films that have used the landscape of Marfa to tell a story, and how these films also act to draw tourism to Marfa.

### **History of Tourism**

A tourist is any person traveling, usually for pleasure. While travel is one of the most ancient and common aspects of human life, the development of tourism is associated with the upper class, and only later did it come into vogue as an accessible activity for everyone. It was in 1841 that Thomas Cook organized his first trip for a group of people, and four years later founded his travel agency.<sup>266</sup> These packaged tours involved a group of people traveling to a specific place to see specific sites. Itineraries were planned in advance and schedules were kept. Souvenirs were purchased and valued as markers of one's experience. The tourist traveled for leisure, for the pursuit of

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<sup>266</sup> Enzensberge, Hans Magnus. "A Theory of Tourism." *New German Critique* 68 (1996): 117-35.

happiness, and to experience parts of the world outside of his immediate home, and these remain reasons for some to travel to Marfa.

As photography developed and was made accessible to the general public (the first Kodak Brownie was produced in 1900), this new medium became an essential component of the experience of tourism. The tourist sought to capture images that would document his experience; he wanted and needed proof that he had been somewhere. Looking at Marfa through the lens of the tourist camera – specifically on Flickr but also other social media sites – creates a very specific place. The images captured are similar in their subject matter if varied in the kind of editing or filtering done to them, and a search for “Marfa” on Flickr or Google Images will return thousands of images. These images collectively define the place of Marfa to anyone with internet access and a desire to “see” Marfa.

The experience of the tourist has been the subject of anthropologists, economists, and geographers in modern times,<sup>267</sup> and the world of the tourist and his experience continues to shift into greater nuance and specificity. Today, the educated tourist is no longer satisfied with a prescribed experience. He is searching for a series of unique encounters that separate him from the masses. That being said, he is also interested in seeing what is in the guidebook, or perhaps the initial site or object or place that had originally drawn him in; however, he wants to see it on his own terms.

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<sup>267</sup> See: Stabler, Mike, M. Thea. Sinclair, and Andreas Papatheodorou. *The Economics of Tourism*. London: Routledge, 2010; Aitchison, Cara, Nicola E. MacLeod, and Stephen J. Shaw. *Leisure and Tourism Landscapes: Social and Cultural Geographies*. London: Routledge, 2000; MacCannell, Dean. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken Books, 1976; Urry, John, and Jonas Larsen. *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage Publications, 2002; Smith, Valene L. *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989; Nash, Dennison. *Anthropology of Tourism*. Kidlington, Oxford: Pergamon, 1996.



## Sites of Tourism in Marfa

Marfa has a healthy influx of tourists,<sup>268</sup> be they traveling to visit family or friends, traveling for a specific cultural production (for example, Chinati's Open House Weekend each October), or traveling with no specific itinerary in mind. ("I just heard about it and was curious.") When visitors come to Marfa, as one local put it, "they either get it, or they don't." To this and other locals, it's very nearly that simple. At first glance, Marfa seems like a sleepy town. And in fact, on many days of the week there are *not* a lot of things going on. (One local remarked with some frustration, "They come to Marfa and I don't know what they do – they walk up and down the street.") Once you start to enter spaces, to interact with people and – most importantly – to ask questions, however, the place of Marfa reveals itself. The tourist experience in general has both a passive and an active component,<sup>269</sup> but to experience Marfa as a tourist, one must be highly active. The landscape and the light are the only givens. Everything else must be uncovered.

It was the creation of the Big Bend National Park as well as the McDonald Observatory (both in the late 1930s) that first provided an official draw of tourism to Marfa. It was the nature lover, stargazer, or camper who traveled through west Texas, stopping in Marfa along the way. Marfa was not usually a lone destination site at this time, but a component of the larger narrative of the tourist's experience in west Texas. A weeklong trip through the Big Bend might include a stop at Fort Davis, Marfa, Alpine, Terlingua, Marathon, Ruidosa, etc. Each town offered a slightly different personality than the next, but they remained small towns with small-town identities. Additionally, the

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<sup>268</sup> As noted earlier, the Chinati Foundation estimates 11,000 annual visitors, the Judd Foundation estimates 2,500 annual visitors, and the Marfa Visitor Center estimates 4,600 annual visitors.

<sup>269</sup> Tuan, Yi-Fu. "Life As A Field Trip." *Geographical Review* 91, no. 1-2 (2001): 41-45.

historic Fort Davis and Fort D.A. Russell invited the military tourist to the area, as military tourism is also its own niche.<sup>270</sup>

The 1955 filming of *Giant* would add another component of tourism to Marfa, and its impact is still seen to this day.<sup>271</sup> This film is perhaps especially interesting as a case study for film tourism because it shows how a major movie production can be a gift to the community that keeps on giving.<sup>272</sup> Further, using Marfa's landscape for recent independent and Blockbuster films continue to reinforce and export Marfa's identity and relevance to outsiders.

The gliding community discovered Marfa for its excellent warm air pockets in 1960, and this added yet another component to the tourism of Marfa. In 1970, Marfa was host to the World Soaring Championship and has been host to four National Soaring Contests, as well as host to annual soaring camps for pilots. Today pilots fly exclusively out of the Marfa Municipal Airport.<sup>273</sup>

In the background of this varied tourism is the draw of the famous Marfa Mystery Lights, an attraction that confounds some and delights others. Likewise, the creation of the formalized viewing center in 2003 is both loved and hated in the community. Those who hate it, perhaps, recognize the absurdity of the structure, that it represents a forced sense of place and a forced draw of tourism for the community. ("It ruined the experience of the lights. Whereas before you would casually pull off the side of the road on your way back from Alpine, now it was this official structure that ruined the charm of the

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<sup>270</sup> Weaver, Adam. "Tourism and the Military: Pleasure and the War Economy." *Annals of Tourism Research* 38, no. 2 (2011): 672-89; Smith, Valene. "War and Tourism An American Ethnography." *Annals of Tourism Research* 25, no. 1 (1998): 202-27.

<sup>271</sup> Graczyk, Michael. "50 Years Later, Movie Classic a Touchstone for West Texas Town." July 1, 2005.

<sup>272</sup> Editorial. "Negative Light Creating Quite a Gray Area." *Austin American-Statesman*, May 22, 2009.

<sup>273</sup> The Marfa Municipal Airport averaged 41 aircraft operations per day over a 12-month period ending in June 2012.



experience.”) The new viewing center represents what original tourism was all about: a prescribed notion of what to see and where to see it. Although Marfa creates these various markers to help and direct the tourist – either in the form of a page in a Big Bend guidebook or a studio tour map during Chinati Open House weekend – there remain those tourists who desire their own, unique experience.

Since the official formation of the Chinati Foundation in 1986, and most notably since Judd’s 1994 death, Marfa’s identity as a center of tourism has focused more and more on art tourism. That said, with the development of various foundations and other establishments in the last fifteen years, this arts focus has included much more than the work of Donald Judd and the Chinati Foundation’s collection. Today, film and music festivals and design and architecture symposiums add to the identity of Marfa and to the overall draw of the tourist. Marfa, forever this small town geographically isolated, has through the years become an important cultural destination that encompasses all of the aforementioned aspects to its identity.

Tourism has directly affected the economy of Marfa and contributes to the success and stability of many businesses. While there are economic benefits provided by the outsider dollar, there are plenty of cultural and social implications that tourism brings with it. This not only affects the experience of the tourist herself, but also the experience of the local who is both a player in the grander narrative of place that the tourist is expecting, and also one reacting to or against the potential superficiality of the tourist’s experience. In this way the tourism industry in Marfa acts to create an inside(r)/outside(r) narrative of place in Marfa. Many interviewees were well aware of how Marfa’s popularity as a tourist destination has affected their lives. One remarked, “I am protective of this town” and another noted that she would “prefer that Marfa be a small

community.” The challenge for locals will be in finding a balance between preserving Marfa and allowing and even encouraging it to evolve.

## **The Tourist Gaze**

The tourist gaze is defined by Urry and Larsen as a set of expectations that tourists place on local populations when they participate in tourism.<sup>274</sup> Through personal experiences, memory, and previous and shared knowledge gained from texts and images, and I would add today – social media, the tourist to Marfa comes with a somewhat prescribed notion of what to see. In this way the tourist gazes upon Marfa through a particular lens, whether thought to be innocent or not. Since seeing is a learned process, there is no innocent gaze in Marfa.

Although by definition tourism means *any* travel outside of one’s home (business travel or to see family, etc.) it is generally understood that tourism is centered on pleasure and personal travel. The tourist is interested in experiencing something outside of his everyday life; he wants to get away from what is normal or expected. And despite the fact that locals may be participating in what would be normal activity to the tourist at home, away from home any mundane activity becomes different. In this way the tourist places more of an emphasis on the specialness or significance of events and experiences of the destination site. There is a heightened sense of curiosity and interest by way of the site’s inherent otherness. Marfa is different therefore it is special. The tourist gazes upon Marfa through his polarized tourist glasses.

As has also been the case with the tourist gaze since the development of photography, the tourist seeks to capture these aspects of his experience. While the tourist

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<sup>274</sup> Urry, John, and Jonas Larsen. *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage Publications, 2002.

may be innocently photographing to document his time in Marfa, he is also participating in the creation of what Said termed “imaginative geographies.”<sup>275</sup> The exportation of photographs and imagery, magazine and newspaper articles, blog posts, Instagram, Twitter feeds and so on over time contribute to a heightened, and false, sense of place. For Marfa, its popularity and presence on a global scale often underlie its reality, which has been written about as problematic, but is not unique to the town. This is why it is so curious that while Marfa is 69 percent Hispanic, with 74 percent of its students economically disadvantaged,<sup>276</sup> and a median income of under \$34,000 dollars, it is also one of the best small towns in America,<sup>277</sup> a result of years of the tourist gaze placing emphasis on its culture and landscape.

It would seem that the tourist is the aggressor in all of this assessment, however the local is not without responsibility. Just as the tourist gazes upon Marfa, the local will also direct a gaze back on the tourist. It is a reaction to being gazed at. Although the tourist and the local somewhat depend on each other (the tourist depends on the local for an authentic experience and the local depends on the tourist for economic success), to be the subject of either gaze is not desired, at least not explicitly. This is why the tourist’s gaze on the local causes a reaction of viewing the tourist with contempt or indifference. To be “a tourist” is not a good thing because it is directly related to the false sense of place garnered through mass tourism.

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<sup>275</sup> See Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979; Cosgrove, Denis E. *Geography and Vision: Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2008; Lane, K. Maria D. *Geographies of Mars: Seeing and Knowing the Red Planet*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

<sup>276</sup> "Judd Foundation Presents \$10,000 to Marfa ISD for Early College Program." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa), December 19, 2012.

<sup>277</sup> Spano, Susan, and Aviva Shen. "The 20 Best Small Towns in America of 2012." *Smithsonian*, May 2012.

A friend was in town to assist in the filming and production of Larry Clark's *Marfa Girl*. He had never before been to Marfa but had heard of it. The apparent poverty and crumbling adobes that are very much a part of the town's visual culture disturbed him. This countered his understanding – based on what he had read and heard – of Marfa as a vibrant arts community. His days were mostly filled with long hours of work, but he was interested in talking to locals, to get his own perspective of Marfa with his own authentic experiences. He asked one shopkeeper what the locals did for relaxation and fun. “Parties” was the shopkeeper's response.

“Parties...that sounds fun. How does one find out about these parties?”

“*Private parties.*”

This brief dialogue is an example of the local turning inward so as to be protected from the tourist's gaze, and the tourist's desire to understand the real Marfa. Marfa, as any culture or place, is constantly undergoing changes; it adapts to its physical environment as the rains come or don't, and it adapts to its social environment as people and stores come and go. Marfa is the setting, the stage, for all its productions, and all the members of its community are players. Because of Marfa's dense cultural capital, the tourist's gaze on Marfa turns the town into a spectacle.

Perhaps it is the ironic, if not insulting, *Prada Marfa* that speaks best to the high level of class in Marfa that is in contrast to so much of its actual (real) identity. Marfa is full of irony and contradiction in this way. There is one local landowner who has made quite a profit from his real estate investments of the early 1990s. A self-proclaimed Communist, he also sells mid-century modern lamps for upwards of \$500.<sup>278</sup> It is as if he is actively participating in two separate worlds in Marfa: the world of the underprivileged

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<sup>278</sup> "Interview with Lineaus Lorette." Interview by Jason Oslo Kolker and Rose Anderson-Lewis. *Marfa Oral History Project*. Marfa Public Radio. August 28, 2012.

local and the world of the affluent tourist or second homeowner. But as a resident of a tourist town, is that not the smartest way to sustain oneself? The shops and restaurants in town look to benefit from the tourist gaze and the associated tourist dollar, and there has been a steady flow of opened and closed shops in recent years. While the shop owners have the best of intentions, the smallness of Marfa, despite its draw of tourism, seems to inherently limit the number of stores and restaurants that can succeed here.<sup>279</sup>

### **Cultural Productions**

Dean MacCannell's<sup>280</sup> discussion of the cultural production and the idea of the authentic are of particular interest in Marfa. The post-modern tourist is aware of his place in the structure of his experience. He is interested in the complete picture of a site's history and is aware of varying class, racial or economic factors, either visible or not, that contribute to the creation of the place. Many of the media pieces that profile Marfa seek to uncover these various factors. However, not all tourists and writers have this level of self-awareness. Marfa, it seems, receives both classes of tourist, given the already-described areas of interest. While some tourists are content to follow an itinerary to see a certain amount of sites and eat or drink at a certain suggested establishment, still others arrive with a fraction of knowledge that then forces them to seek out more events in which to participate. The post-modern tourist is a searcher, not ready to accept anything prescribed or formulaic, while the more traditional tourist requires some level of guidance or assistance to enable his experience. Regardless, all tourists share the desire to

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<sup>279</sup> Although the number of sales tax permits in Marfa in recent years is alarming: 2009: 1; 2010: 26; 2011: 14; 2012: 17; 2013: 24. Source: Texas Comptroller.

<sup>280</sup> MacCannell, Dean. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken, 1976.

be assimilated into the culture and society to some extent.<sup>281</sup> It has been said that “we are all tourists,”<sup>282</sup> and acceptance of such a statement allows us to move beyond the traditional notion of tourism and into the larger experience of place. Marfa’s various cultural productions serve to enhance this experience for tourists and locals.

Cultural productions are rituals, and they take many forms in Marfa. The fact that the quantity and quality of cultural productions are both high in Marfa is testament to the resulting cultural capital. Despite often low attendance numbers (when compared to those of a larger city)<sup>283</sup> these activities are important to Marfa’s identity and economy. There is a *density* of culture in Marfa, a distillation of good to better, that provides local and tourist alike the opportunity for high quality activities. In no particular order, here is a sampling of cultural productions that one may experience in Marfa: Trans-Pecos Music Festival, CineMarfa Film Festival, Marfa Film Festival, Chinati Open House Weekend, the Marfa Lights Festival, Farm Stand Marfa, lectures at the Marfa Book Company, Ballroom Marfa’s free summer DJ Camp for children and teenagers, and plays, lectures, talent shows, film screenings, music events, dances and colloquiums, and so on at the Crowley Theater (between 2001 and 2013 there have been about 220 events there, most of them free).<sup>284</sup> Even the annual citywide yard sale is a cultural production, providing a focused agenda that allows the active participation of citizens and visitors.

The term cultural production is an acknowledgement that the event is made, composed, created, by someone or some group. This is important to distinguish in discussing Marfa because these cultural productions are not a given; they are scripted by

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> From Anatole Broyard: “We are all tourists in history, and irony is what we win in wars.”

<sup>283</sup> A reading at the Marfa Book Company could turn out 30 people, while a lecture at the Crowley Theater could see 100 turn out. On a slow night at Padre’s there may only be 10 people listening to the live band, and so on. During big weekends Marfa’s population often doubles.

<sup>284</sup> <http://crowleytheater.org/>

a particular person or persons, and some of them may be designed to attract a particular type of person. The annual citywide yard sale, for example, is a democratic event that invites every member of the community to participate. The Marfa Film Festival, on the other hand, is a highly focused production that charges hundreds of dollars for a weeklong pass, thereby excluding many locals from attending. Conversely, and as a welcomed way for locals to participate in the arts, Chinati offers periodic free art classes to local students, while the Marfa Studio of the Arts is a non-profit that brings art classes to the town's schools. This has become a valued way for locals to participate in Marfa's heavy arts identity, and the support doesn't end there – in 2012, the Judd Foundation presented the Marfa Independent School District with a \$10,000 grant to support an early college program in a partnership with next-door Sul Ross University. This shows that however “divided” some might say Marfa is between the arts crowd and the Hispanic or ranching native communities, there is work being done to include all members of Marfa's community.

The various venues in Marfa that allow the continued occurrence of cultural productions are necessary to the community and to the ever-revolving door of tourists, and the town has always had high quality cultural productions to partake in, going back to the earliest ranching days. Marfa had the Palace Theater, which took the place of the former Opera House; the Texas Theater across the street; a drive-in theater at the western edge of town; and a community of ranchers that were well-educated, traveled, and lived “Texas-large.” Despite the significant lull in activities that resulted from the 1950s drought, Marfa has most certainly recovered – partly by way of Donald Judd, but more so recently by a separate surge of new Marfans and their varied interests. This has allowed locals to partake in events that may not exist without the sustainability provided by tourism.

Within these cultural productions, the local and the tourist are in search of an authentic experience. The authentic is a “real” experience, wherein getting “off the beaten path” is desired. The tourist in search of the authentic is looking to uncover something the guidebooks don’t contain, to meet the locals and to get behind the scenes of the community. She is looking for the unique, the unusual. However, the natures of some tourist attractions in Marfa deny this type of experience. The Chinati and Judd Foundation tours, for example, are prescribed events, with a limited number of people allowed in each group. They start at a certain time and follow a specific path from one place to the next until their conclusion. People on the tours are dependent on the guide as a source of information and, perhaps, inspiration. The best way to tour the spaces of either foundation is ironically to do so during Open House Weekend. While the massive onslaught of visitors makes this annual weekend in October arguably the worst time to experience Marfa in general, it is the only time that both foundations open their doors for the visitor to guide herself throughout the collection and spaces. In this way a visitor may experience the art and the space at her own pace, at her chosen time, and this makes for a much more authentic experience of the art.

As Marfa has increased its offerings of cultural productions to the local and the tourist, it has become that much more “known” to the outside world. The exponential growth of newspaper, magazine, or other media pieces devoted to summarizing or explaining Marfa instead may result in the narrowing or polarizing of place by impacting the expectation of the tourist to Marfa. In reading or hearing about Marfa from the media, the tourist already has an idea of what to expect upon arrival, but this idea may not match what is experienced. For the local, the increase in tourism may force them to recede into private spaces so as to maintain “their” Marfa, and to not become a focus of the tourist gaze.



Having said that, the smallness of town makes interacting with locals a fairly easy thing to do, and the sources for finding activities are small when compared to larger towns: you can ask someone for advice or recommendations, you can read the weekly newspaper, you can stop by the Marfa Public Library or Pueblo Market or Frama coffee shop to see what advertisements have been posted. You can even scan the MarfaList website (Marfa's own version of Craigslist, Figure 5.1) for daily and weekly goings-on. Most recently, Marfa resident Buck Johnston created a Marfa App (Figure 5.2) that can be downloaded to one's smartphone. Using it, you can map out restaurant and store locations (as many streets in Marfa are not marked) to help you navigate the town. Alternatively, you can choose to access none of these things and head out on your own.

What separates Marfa from other places of tourism is that its visual landscape is removed from its placement as a tourist site. By this I mean that there are no rides, no shopping districts, and no guided tours (beyond those of the Chinati and Judd Foundation). There are few official markers to guide the tourist through an agenda, so the tourist must write his own agenda. Perhaps it is this unassuming quality of Marfa that is what its tourists find so appealing, as they continue to make the journey. For these art enthusiasts, pilots, outdoorsmen, and lovers of unexplainable phenomena, Marfa is a "must see" destination.

### **Marfa Mystery Lights**

It was in 1883 that the rancher Ralph Ellison first spotted lights at Paisano Pass at the base of the Chinati Mountains as he was driving cattle toward Marfa from Alpine. He believed them to be fires from the Apaches, but during the daylight hours on following days, he and his crew were unable to locate any tracks or ashen remnants of fire. What

would become known as the “Marfa Mystery Lights” have been mystifying (and confounding) folks ever since.

Ellison’s account wasn’t documented in his journal, but his story was passed down by oral tradition to family members.<sup>285</sup> An early written story of the lights appeared in 1945 in the *San Angelo Times*,<sup>286</sup> and there are stories and documentation<sup>287</sup> from the pilots of the Marfa Army Airfield who spotted them from the air but were unable to locate a source. Says one pilot of a light, “We both had the distinct impression that it knew exactly where we were and that it was just daring us to chase it. It seemed to possess intelligence.”<sup>288</sup>

Since this time, various books<sup>289</sup> have explored the proposed theories of the mystery lights as well as serving to document a growing body of eyewitness accounts. Newspaper articles added to these stories throughout the years, never solving but always perpetuating the mystery. Teams of scientists have traveled to the field with equipment, some advanced and some low-tech. The television show *Unsolved Mysteries*<sup>290</sup> has featured the unexplained lights, and a search on YouTube produces myriad low-resolution videos, mostly juvenile, of these attempts at documentation and explanation.

One interviewee, Armando Vasquez, told me he had pushed (some would say, “pestered”)<sup>291</sup> the Chamber of Commerce to start advertising the lights as a draw for tourism. His enthusiasm for what he knew would result in tourism dollars paid off – in

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<sup>285</sup> Hall, Michael. "The Truth Is Out There." *Texas Monthly*, June 2006.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Interview with Georgie Lee Kahl, from an unpublished memoir by Fritz Kahl.

<sup>288</sup> Riemenschneider, Chris. "Of Gaseous Jack Rabbits, Dead Apache Chiefs and a Phenomenon Cool." *Austin American-Statesman*, October 28, 1999.

<sup>289</sup> Brueske, Judith. *The Marfa Lights*. Second Revised Edition. Alpine, Texas: Ocotillo Enterprises, 1988; Bunnell, James. *Night Orbs: An Exploration into Unknown Luminous Phenomena*. Cedar Creek, TX: Lacey Pub., 2003.

<sup>290</sup> "Legend: Marfa Lights." In *Unsolved Mysteries*. October 25, 1989.

<sup>291</sup> Hall, Michael. "The Truth Is Out There." *Texas Monthly*, June 2006.

1986 Marfa held its first Marfa Lights Festival, which has taken place every Labor Day weekend since then. That was also the year that the Chamber of Commerce built the first roadside viewing area for the lights, which acted to centralize the onlookers and keep cars off of private ranch roads.

The oldest legend of the lights is the legend of Alaste, who was the last Apache chief in the Big Bend. Alaste was tricked by the Mexicans and separated from his tribe, who were then slaughtered. The ghosts of this tribe are said to be signaling Alaste with their fires.<sup>292</sup> This theory is an important one in that it predates the automobile, and also speaks to the activity and history of the area that predates Marfa itself.

Other theories relate to the area's history: atomic military testing on the army airfield, which never happened; underground phosphorescent gas because of the geologic history of the Marfa plateau, but a source has never been found; some even propose that it is the residents of Marfa taking turns adventuring around with flashlights so as to attract tourism.

In 1975, a Sul Ross University physics class went in search of the lights but came to no conclusion.<sup>293</sup> In 1999, one of the students from this class, now a teacher himself, led another expedition of high school physics students, armed with low-tech tools to aid in their research. This time, they determined that the lights' timing and frequency did correlate with automobiles weaving in and out of the mountain road where the lights are seen. In 2004, the University of Texas at Dallas chapter of the Society of Physics

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<sup>292</sup> Riemenschneider, Chris. "Of Gaseous Jack Rabbits, Dead Apache Chiefs and a Phenomenon Cool." *Austin American-Statesman*, October 28, 1999.

<sup>293</sup> Bunnell, James. *Night Orbs: An Exploration into Unknown Luminous Phenomena*. Cedar Creek, TX: Lacey Pub., 2003; Sedgwick, Weston. "In Search of Spring Break and Marfa Lights." *The Pantagraph*, April 13, 1999.

Students went on the hunt for the lights, and concluded that the so-called mystery lights are car headlights.

The obvious problem with the car headlights theory is that cars weren't around in the 19th century, and during the war years, gas was rationed, making frequent automobile use uncommon. Further, there are plenty of stories of seeing the lights up close and personal, in addition to the lights seeming to have a sort of intelligence about them – all of which must either humor or infuriate the scientists. The eyewitness accounts of seeing the lights up close, which are unusual, have all noted that the lights seemed friendly, almost playful, and that the witness never felt frightened or threatened.

The most-likely explanation is that the Marfa Mystery Lights are a meteorological phenomenon.<sup>294</sup> This proposal holds that the lights are an illusion, caused by the layering of cool air on the ground and warm air above.<sup>295</sup> These opposing air densities bend light “like a lens”<sup>296</sup> to create these blinking lights that move about the horizon. The mirage of these projected lights could be sourced to the car headlights of the highway from Presidio to Marfa, or of other light sources. For all the fieldwork and attempts at explanation that various researchers have undertaken, most locals are content with the mystery of the lights. The mystery is a component of Marfa's identity that makes the place special.

When I told Armando in 2011 that I had not seen the lights he was flabbergasted. “You will see them with me,” he said. We got in my car and drove west of town to a ranch road. After a few minutes of looking out into the distance, one appeared to the west, then another to the east. They flickered randomly back and forth, with no sense of

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<sup>294</sup> Burnett, John, writer. "Cause of "Marfa Lights" Either UFOs or Car Headlights." In *NPR*. April 1, 1994.

<sup>295</sup> Simons, Paul. "Mystery Lights That Hang over Marfa." *The Times* (London), November 17, 2005.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid*.

timing or choreography. A third light appeared, closer to the second. The lights were dancing a simple and silly dance and we were witness to it, just two people on the side of this dusty ranch road. Seeing the lights is to confirm their mystery, and to embrace it.

The mystery lights vary in both size and color, but are most often said to be the size of baseballs, grapefruits, or basketballs when seen up close. They fluctuate in their luminosity, appearing to shift between dim and bright. The lights split and rejoin, as if playful, and they appear to shift color, from white to yellow to orange, and even red and blue and green. The lights can disappear and reappear in the same spot or elsewhere. Multiple lights often look like they are interacting with each other.

What is of most interest to me, as far as mysterious lights go, is that in a group of curious onlookers, some people will see the lights, and others won't. This refers back to the idea of *seeing* the landscape, and further to *who* is doing the seeing.<sup>297</sup> Landscape, and sight, is not a given; it is an active process. If we accept that our sight is an imperfect, subjective tool, we can accept that there will be some things nearly impossible to explain and reconcile. The Marfa Mystery Lights are real, and strange, and they are unique to Marfa, and it is their charm and mystery that should be embraced. As the pilot Fritz Kahl put it, "I still say the best way to see the lights is with a six-pack of beer and a good looking woman."<sup>298</sup>

## **Film Tourism**

After both military installations closed and until the influence of art would reshape the town's identity, Marfa was known mostly as the place to go to see the

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<sup>297</sup> Buck, Megan Lea. "Marfa Lights Inspire Conspiracy Novel." *Associated Press*, August 10, 2009.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

aforementioned Marfa Mystery Lights, and it was where the 1956 movie *Giant* was filmed. Although *Giant* is still often referenced when speaking of Marfa, there have been a number of films in recent years also shot in Marfa: *No Country for Old Men* (2007), *There Will Be Blood* (2007), *Remember Back, Remember When* (2008), *Marfa Girl* (2012), and *Far Marfa* (2013). While some of these films use Marfa as a representation of landscape, others use Marfa as a character itself; i.e. to some extent the film is about Marfa. Further, this has led to the extension of film culture in Marfa by the creation of two film festivals (Marfa Film Festival and CineMarfa) as well as a growing trend to use the landscape of Marfa for magazine and advertising shoots.<sup>299</sup> Collectively these films, festivals and print media project a specific place of Marfa to the outside world.

By way of the movies filmed in Marfa, as well as the two annual film festivals, Marfa's tourism economy has expanded to include that of film tourism. Film tourism can be characterized by four categories:<sup>300</sup> 1) the influence of film on the decision to travel, 2) film tourists themselves, 3) the impacts of film tourism on visitation numbers and on residents, and 4) destination marketing activities related to film tourism. Marfa's identity as a destination for film tourism began with *Giant*, and was given a boost with 2007's *No Country for Old Men* and *There Will Be Blood*. The recent *Marfa Girl* and *Far Marfa* also have contributed to this growing market. Additionally, these films all reach different audiences because they are so varied – *Giant* is an epic and a classic, *No Country* and *There Will Be Blood* are successful blockbuster films with well-known casts, *Remember Back, Remember When* reached the short films audience, *Marfa Girl* reached out to the

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<sup>299</sup> Marfa On Location is a production company that assists filmmakers, designers and photographers while in Marfa. Some of the clients include Neiman Marcus, British Vogue, Frye Boots, W Magazine, and Urban Outfitters.

<sup>300</sup> Hudson, S., & Ritchie, J. (2006). Promoting Destinations via Film Tourism: An Empirical Identification of Supporting Marketing Initiatives. *Journal of Travel Research*, 44(4), 387-396.

more arty crowd familiar with Larry Clark's controversial work, and *Far Marfa* accessed the independent film industry.

These films in some way represent the landscape of Marfa, and this representation is what the film tourist is looking to find. The film tourist attempts "to connect with their emotional response to a film at the place in which it was set/filmed."<sup>301</sup> And as evidenced by the diversity of movies that were filmed in Marfa, this emotional response can cast a wide net.

### ***GIANT* (1956)**

Marfa in the 1950s was on its way to becoming a ghost town. The population had dwindled with the closing of both Fort D.A. Russell and the Marfa Army Airfield, and the seven-year drought of 1950-1957 would only intensify this loss. It was in 1955 that the little town filled up with movie stars, if only for a short time, giving it not only an economic but also an emotional boom. Director George Stevens filmed *Giant* in Marfa and its cultural impact is still felt today. A collection of memorabilia remains on display in a room off of the lobby in the Hotel Paisano, and the film plays on continuous loop on a small television there. Marfa has held anniversary weekends to allow cast and crew alike to gather and relive fond memories, in addition to attracting the tourist dollar,<sup>302</sup> and as recently as 2011 the Alamo Drafthouse's Texas Monthly Rolling Roadshow passed through Marfa to screen both *Giant* and *No Country for Old Men* for free, drawing impressive crowds and continuing a correlation of these films to Marfa's identity. Indeed,

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<sup>301</sup> Beeton, S. (2010). Landscape as characters: Film, tourism, and a sense of place. *Metro, Special Feature Section on Landscape and Location in Australian Cinema*, 166, 114-119.

<sup>302</sup> Editorial. "Negative Light Creating Quite a Gray Area." *Austin American-Statesman*, May 22, 2009.

film production can bring to a town both financial and cultural benefits long after the crew departs.<sup>303</sup>

It helped that *Giant* earned Stevens the Academy Award for Best Director, as well as a handful of other nominations for the film. Set in far west Texas in a desolate and dry land, the epic film traces the lives of the Benedict family, through its patriarch Jordan (Bick) Benedict, played by Rock Hudson, and his outspoken Virginian bride, Leslie Benedict, played by Elizabeth Taylor. Their two children, Luz and Jordan, would see the clan into a newer generation, one in which cattle ranching is undergoing technological changes, the oil business is taking over the land, and discrimination against Mexicans is being challenged.

The young Jordan Benedict defies his father by becoming a doctor, and his marriage to a local Mexican girl, Juana, is the source of much discrimination. Meanwhile, Luz marries a ranch hand, and together they want to do experimental farming on their own, smaller sect of land in lieu of taking over his family's ranch. In essence, the film deals with inevitable change in an endless landscape, as well as the conditions of the Mexican workers, all living in poverty and making too little on which to survive.

The protagonist in the film, Jett Rink, played by James Dean, is an angry, jealous young man who successfully reaches oil on his small plot of land and proceeds to grow a vast oil business that encroaches on the Reata Ranch. Jett's drunken life is filled with excess and embellishment, and his relationship with Bick is tumultuous.

One of the last scenes in the film finds Bick defending his daughter-in-law and grandson, as they are all asked to leave a diner whose owner refuses service to Mexicans. The owner wins the physical conflict that erupts against Bick, and as the white diner

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<sup>303</sup> See Hudson, Simon, and J.R. Brent Ritchie. "Promoting Destinations via Film Tourism: An Empirical Identification of Supporting Marketing Initiatives." *Journal of Travel Research* 44, no. 4 (2006): 387-96 and Editorial. "Negative Light Creating Quite a Gray Area." *Austin American-Statesman*, May 22, 2009.



patrons silently look on, we are reminded of how much more work there is to be done to overcome discrimination.

The movie was well received and was one of the first mainstream films to address racism.<sup>304</sup> In this case, it specifically addresses racism against Hispanics in Texas. In 2014, the documentary, *Children of Giant*, is scheduled for release. In it the filming of *Giant* is discussed: how it affected the community of Marfa and how the issues of discrimination have evolved in the last 50 or so years. In Edna Ferber's novel, on which the original movie is based, Leslie Benedict points out that Texas was taken from Mexico, and her words infuriate Bick. He is a stubborn Texan who refuses to acknowledge the racial history of the landscape, and she is the voice to this history and the tension that its acknowledgement creates. The film is a fictional story, but a representation of the culture of west Texas, and the fictional place of landscape in the film is the real place of Marfa, whose own history of discrimination cannot be denied.

#### ***NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN (2007) AND THERE WILL BE BLOOD (2007)***

While *Giant* explores issues of oil and discrimination, placing a fictional but important narrative onto the landscape of Marfa, two recent films also use the landscape of Marfa to tell dramatic stories of violence and greed. These two films have put a modern emphasis on Marfa: *No Country for Old Men* and *There Will Be Blood*, both of 2007. Like *Giant*, these films merely use the landscape of Marfa to represent place, but they have also served to direct film tourism to Marfa as well as highlight the town as an agreeable place in which to film. That these two films were both highly successful

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<sup>304</sup> Graczyk, Michael. "50 Years Later, Movie Classic a Touchstone for West Texas Town." July 1, 2005. Curiously, Edna Ferber's novel was not well-received.

focused even more media attention on Marfa,<sup>305</sup> replenishing the *Giant* identity and perhaps directing a flood of additional filmmakers and artists to Marfa. Marfa's landscape is posed to become as iconic and oft used as Monument Valley.<sup>306</sup> Will this prove to be a continuing economic pulse to Marfa?

*No Country for Old Men* is a thriller based on Cormac McCarthy's 2006 novel of the same name, and is set along the border in west Texas in 1980. It follows the story of Llewelyn Moss, played by Josh Brolin, who stumbles upon the remnants of a drug trade gone wrong, and finds one man left barely alive and begging for water. Moss discovers a briefcase filled with cash and returns home to hide it under his house. Presumably, he would have gotten away with this, but his guilt wakes him in the middle of the night and he returns to the scene with a gallon of water for the dying man.

Unfortunately for Moss, men are waiting for him when he returns, and he barely escapes on foot. Forced to leave his car behind, we then know that a simple vehicle trace will identify him to these other men, and he is forced to leave home and send his wife to Odessa to hide. The local sheriff, Ed Tom Bell, played by Tommy Lee Jones, figures out Moss's predicament and tries to find him in order to help him. Meanwhile, the owner of the cash, a psychotic and strange, ruthless killer, Anton Chigurh, played by Javier Bardem, also hunts for Moss to reclaim his property and will kill anyone who gets in his way. There is a lot of death in this film.

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<sup>305</sup> Graczyk, Michael. "1 Stoplight, 2 Movies and 16 Academy Award Nominations: Welcome to Marfa, Texas." *Associated Press*, February 18, 2008; Elsworth, Catherine. "Marfa (pop 2,400), the Desert Town That Will Be the Star of the Oscars." *The Daily Telegraph* (London), February 21, 2008; Gumbel, Andrew. "Back from the Dead: The Town That Hosted Two Oscar Hopes Wilderness That Starsin Oscar Contenders under Threat." *The Independent*(London), February 23, 2008; Holt, Lester, and George Lewis, writers. "Marfa, Texas, a Hot Spot for Hollywood Movie Makers." Transcript. In *NBC*. February 24, 2008; Norris, Michele, writer. "On Location: 50 Years of Movie Magic in Marfa, Texas." *NPR*. July 15, 2011.

<sup>306</sup> Gumbel, Andrew. "Back from the Dead: The Town That Hosted Two Oscar Hopes Wilderness That Starsin Oscar Contenders under Threat." *The Independent*(London), February 23, 2008.

As this comes from a McCarthy novel, there are no happy endings, but despite the death and violence, the film (and writing) is breathtakingly beautiful. Marfa's untouched and desolate landscape perfectly represents the place of McCarthy's prose, and this contrast of visual splendor to the lack of humanity in Bardem's character shows the viewer a harsh and beautiful world.

The film, directed by Ethan and Joel Cohen, took home four Oscars, which further served to focus attention on Marfa.<sup>307</sup> Marfa native Chip Love, whose grandmother was an extra in *Giant*, plays one of the first victims of Chigurh. For him, being an extra took only a few days of work and paid a nominal sum. His part in the film was more about the charm of being an extra, of continuing on this little family legacy.

Paul Thomas Anderson's *There Will Be Blood* loosely follows Upton Sinclair's *Oil!* from 1927. Instead of Sinclair's focus on the son as the central character in the novel, Anderson chooses instead to focus on the father, an entrepreneurial oil driller. Regular deaths throughout the movie serve to show an industry that is driven by greed and violence. Daniel Plainview, played by Daniel Day-Lewis, becomes father to an infant, H.W., after the death of one of his workers in the earlier days of their drilling. As his prospects grow to include the community of Little Boston, California, there occurs another worker's death, as well as his son's loss of hearing that will tar their relationship. Over the next decades, Plainview slips further from reality and compassion, turning into a heartless old man. Like *No Country for Old Men*, this film has no happy endings, instead painting a gruesome and damaged oil industry.

The landscape of Marfa is used in both films of 2007 to represent place, and it is a dry, harsh and vast landscape set against decidedly grim and bleak stories. While Marfa is

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<sup>307</sup> Martin, Rachel, writer. "A Shout Out from Marfa, Texas." NPR. February 22, 2008.

so often characterized as having a beautiful, limitless landscape, one could choose to see this limitlessness as a negative quality. It is beautiful, but also terrifying. It is approachable when one is prepared (with water, proper shoes, and protection from the sun) but becomes forbidden, inaccessible and deadly without preparation or tools. In these two films, the landscape is a character in that its harshness and isolation serves to direct its users. The landscape builds and defines the character of the person. Here, instead of man producing the landscape around him, he is a product of the qualities of the landscape itself.

***REMEMBER BACK, REMEMBER WHEN (2008)***

Hitting close to home is the very personal short film by Rainer Judd, *Remember Back, Remember When* of 2008. In just over ten minutes the viewer is presented with an account of a marital dispute that ends with the father driving off with his two children, crying out in the back of the pickup truck's small cab.

The film takes place in far west Texas in 1977. Two young children, a boy and a girl, are playing in the front yard of a modest home in an otherwise unremarkable town. To anyone familiar with Marfa or with Judd's personal history, it's easy to make the assumption that the children represent Rainer and her brother, Flavin; the mother and wife is Julie Finch and the father and husband is Donald Judd. The children seem to be creating a water powering system by digging up and moving around dirt in the front yard with plastic trucks and buckets.

The landscape is identifiable as Marfa, and it is no stretch to imagine this space as the late 1970s – it requires very little maneuvering as a filmmaker to refrain from including the modern and refurbished housing of Marfa of recent years. The sun is

blinding, as it always has been; the colors are rich and yet sun-washed, as they always have been.

The mother, drinking tequila with the father in the middle of the day, makes mention of going back to New York, where the artist will be able to access the people who are at present confused by his work. The father grumbles, “Too many people is the problem with New York.” The father’s refusal escalates with passion; the one attempt at a flirty and playful reconciliation only allows the woman to suggest that her husband is having an affair, which angers him more. The wife asks him not to fight in front of the children. “I don’t give a damn who sees the goddamn truth,” says the father. Is this Judd talking, or is an older Rainer speaking through him?

The man starts to drive off in his truck, only to stop and reverse back into the yard. He gathers up both children, scared and clinging to their mother, and again the truck takes off down the road. The mother is left standing alone in the yard, upset, confused, and what we can only imagine a little bit fearful: for her children and for her own uncertain future.

In light of Marfa’s identity, this film serves as a reminder of the realness of the characters in Judd’s life. Perhaps Judd was martyred because of an early death, at the top of his career. We are left with this small town as a relic to the artist. His home and studio space are fetishized; nothing has been altered since his death. From the slippers at his bedside, to the stacks of bowls in the kitchen, to the well-ordered and simple piles of drawings and plans in his office, this Marfa belongs to the patriarch Judd. How have Rainer and Flavin (and Julie) found their own space outside of Judd’s legacy? How does it feel to live with the ghost of this man who is held with such high esteem (if not anecdotal eccentricism and passion) knowing all too well the details of his flaws?

The modern Marfan, or tourist to Marfa, readily touts its remoteness and simplicity as a continuing draw. This is a romantic notion that is true for few people, or at least, few residents of Marfa. There are countless people who have moved here in a search for simplicity, and space, with the idea of freedom from the problems that surround them. In reality, the smallness of Marfa, and perhaps the abundance of space, is exactly what magnifies one's problems. One interviewee dubbed the draw to town the "Marfa Mystique," as if it were an illness that could be treated. "You can't escape your problems here," said another. "You deal with them head on."

For Rainer and Flavin, their childhood was marked by their parents' divorce and their subsequent move to Marfa. As is usually the case, this did not come without incident. Julie and Don divorced in 1976, but the next year the children were essentially kidnapped to Marfa from New York by their father.<sup>308</sup> Eventually, the family found itself in the charming Presidio County courthouse for the custody battle, and both children chose to stay with their father in Marfa. Rainer's Marfa, then, is a much different place than it is to a newcomer of recent years. Her Marfa, though filled with beautiful light, beautiful art, and what at times must be nostalgia for her late father, is also filled with the emotions of a childhood to an impassioned artist and father, and the memory of her parents' failing marriage. Her Marfa is home, but it is also the starting point for a future elsewhere.

*Remember Back, Remember When* marks a shift in the placing of Marfa in film, as it is a narrative based on truth, and the landscape in the story is the landscape in the film. Marfa does not only represent a landscape, or an idea; it is one of the characters in the story. As Marfa has become perhaps greater than its parts combined because of its noted

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<sup>308</sup> Patoski, Joe Nick. "What Would Donald Judd Do?" July 2001.  
<http://www.joenickp.com/texas/donaldjudd.html>.

isolation, saturation of arts, and the subsequent aura and weight that come with this, it has become a place of meaning outside of its self, or space. Moving forward, Marfa becomes a brand, a commodity, and the following films demonstrate this.

### ***MARFA GIRL (2012)***

We are given a view into the tangled lives of locals, Border Patrol employees (known as BPs), and a Chinati artist-in-residence in Larry Clark's *Marfa Girl* of 2012. The film is set and filmed in Marfa, so there are constant visual markers to anyone who knows the town. The music is uber cool and the young characters smoke weed and ride skateboards. It is very much in the style of Larry Clark, who is known for portraying sex, drugs, and violence in both his photographs and films. His 1971 book, *Tulsa*, first established himself and his 1995 film, *Kids*, is one of his best-known works.

We are first introduced to Adam and his friend, two Hispanic locals who get harassed by two Border Patrol agents, who are then each driven home by an agent. Adam's mom laments, "I don't see the white kids getting pulled over by Border Patrol." There's a weird friction, in that despite the fact that everyone knows everyone, and seems to get along – Hispanics and Border Patrol included – the power struggle of race and class is still present.

In his high school class, Adam falls asleep, and his white teacher reprimands him by spanking him with a vintage, if minimal-looking, paddle. Both Adam and teacher seem to be laughing through this ordeal (16 swats for his birthday, with one for next year) and it's unclear whether one or both of them find some erotic pleasure in the ritual. Clark

wasn't far off in his portrayal of the Marfa Independent School district – until 2013 corporal punishment was allowed in school.<sup>309</sup>

Over the course of the film we are introduced a little more to each character and to the place of Marfa: dogs running through barren yards, crumbling adobe, trailers, and the bustle of the Dairy Queen. The high schoolers are having sex, smoking pot, and doing all this in front of a young teenage mother's baby. Adam's mother at one point speaks of taking a dead, frozen bird back to New York for a proper burial, because "this place has this bad spirit."

The Marfa girl of *Marfa Girl* is an artist-in-residence at Chinati, who sleeps with everyone and smokes or snorts anything. Still, she seems to be bringing just enough edge to this small town to force the locals to question their surroundings. She's not afraid to smoke a joint in the face of two Border Patrol men, and she gives Adam a sexual awakening with her blunt discussions of sex.

For Marfa girl, "the world is sound and everything in it is vibration."

Even within the Hispanic community there is friction, as a Hispanic Border Patrol agent is by Marfa girl's definition working against his own kind. In Marfa, jobs are scarce. Between employment uncertainty, pregnancy scares, and harassment from the Border Patrol, the options for advancement available to the locals are few.

Finally, the one white Border Patroler who was especially fond of harassing Adam tells of his childhood woes – an abusive father – which make his harshness a little more forgivable, until he rapes the Marfa girl and then kidnaps Adam, driving him to an abandoned building out of town. It's unclear what his purpose is in bringing him here, but he then drives back to town alone with a new purpose of killing Adam's mother. Adam

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<sup>309</sup> Garcia, John Daniel. "Corporal Punishment Ends at Marfa ISD." *The Big Bend Sentinel*(Marfa), July 25, 2013.



walks back to town, gathers a shotgun from his friend's house, and walks into his home to see the agent strangling his mom. Adam makes a quick, clean shot, and this Border Patrol villain is dead. In the end, we are left with the ritual cleansing of the bad spirits, and life goes on.

The place of Marfa in *Marfa Girl* is far from picturesque, but does it represent Marfa? As opposed to the previous films discussed, *Marfa Girl* is about the actual place of Marfa, and portrays not a wide, picturesque landscape of grama grass and mesquite but instead a small town with big problems. But the conflict between the Border Patrol and the Hispanics doesn't seem right. The Border Patrol is not a police force; most of their time is spent outside of town. The drugs and sex and conflict of this film seem to be overdramatized, and ultimately paint a very ugly portrait of Marfa. Is Clark's message that a cultural mecca such as Marfa is never without its imperfections?

That Larry Clark is a well known photographer and director encouraged a good deal of media attention while he was filming, and although he won the top prize at the 7<sup>th</sup> Rome Film Festival, there has been little feedback from the Marfa residents on the film itself. *The Big Bend Sentinel* featured a number of stories before and during filming, but none discuss the story in any detail. In fact, most of the attention paid to Clark has been in his alternative way of releasing the film: directly from his website for a 24-hour rental fee. When I asked locals about the film's depiction of Marfa, none had seen it; it may very well be that no one in Marfa has chosen to pay Clark to see his film. For them, it may be just another attempt by an outsider to portray their town.

### ***FAR MARFA* (2013)**

Lastly, the film *Far Marfa* of 2013<sup>310</sup> gives us another portal into Marfa as place and as a character. The film follows the life of Carter Frazier, a down-on-his-luck resident of Marfa who becomes entangled in a mysterious disappearance of a piece of art. Like *Marfa Girl*, Marfa's placement in this film is as itself: a real place that is not being used as a substitute for someone else's narrative. Additionally, most of the characters in the film are residents of Marfa, so in this way they are participating in a movie that is not only filmed in their town but also portraying their own lives.

Carter believes that musicians would be drawn to Marfa for the space and time to create and as such wants to build a recording studio. However, his finances are out of order, and he seems to stumble through one misfortune after another. The scenes take one throughout both the exterior and interior spaces of Marfa – bicycling and walking around town, attending parties in homes and gallery openings, eating and socializing in the various restaurants and venues. These spaces show the diversity of Marfa's interior world: cluttered small homes with secondhand furniture and poor lighting as compared to the pristine, bright and sparse spaces of the newer homes. The polished and the disheveled mesh together, and no one seems to take life too seriously. In *Far Marfa*, the landscape of the town is given center stage, but in this film it's not as vast as it is often described. Carter seems to be suffocating in this small world, but the thought of a departure never enters his mind.

Leaving one romantic relationship and entering another as the movie progresses, Carter must find the lost work of art by the fictional painter Bob Rafowitz that was randomly gifted to him in the beginning of the film by a man who is soon found dead.

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<sup>310</sup> Thanks to writer and director Cory Van Dyke for the screener copy.

The misfits and art world snobs of Marfa offer sources of help and frustration, and this reveals the existential nature of one man's search.

Perhaps what make this film most hilarious are its playful jabs at the art scene in Marfa. Carter and his love interest, Quarry, attend a fundraising event at a large modern home. As they arrive, they both ask, "Where did all these people come from?...and what do they all do?" Later on at the party another character describes early Minimalism: "When everything was reduced to its essential meaninglessness and mystery." Finally, at the end of the film, once Carter's prospects look brighter, the missing art is revealed to us. It's a tall canvas of dark grey with two white horizontal lines running through it, visually dividing the space into three parts. Does it mean anything? Does it matter?

## **FILM FESTIVALS**

It is not only the shooting of films in Marfa that have served to define it and to place it in the minds of outsiders, but also the two film festivals that descend on Marfa nearly every year. The Marfa Film Festival has become well known in the global film festival circuit and "celebrates innovation and excellence in film through mindful curation and fostering a relaxed social space."<sup>311</sup> CineMarfa is a non-profit that was founded to "promote the art and culture of film and filmmaking in Marfa."<sup>312</sup> Both festivals screen between 20 to 30 films each year.

CineMarfa is a free festival that screens films made by visual artists, as well as alternative and archival films that typically are not shown in theaters. Some but not all of the work is made by Texas artists.

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<sup>311</sup> Source: <http://www.marfafilmfestival.com/>

<sup>312</sup> Source: <http://www.cinemarfa.org/about/>

The Marfa Film Festival, on the other hand, charges \$550 for a VIP pass and \$275 for a general pass for its five-day event. Individual screenings are \$15, but local discounts are given. The pricing-out of local residents is not unique to this film festival, but it is worth noting here. Despite the wealth of cultural events offered year-round in Marfa, these events are not always free, and thus can exclude locals who cannot afford to pay even a \$10 admission fee. As one Marfa local detailed, “If you do not price the tickets so that the locals can be included...you will not find Marfa to be as friendly.”<sup>313</sup> While the influx of festival attendees brings tourism dollars to Marfa, it also creates an atmosphere of exclusion between the insider and outsider. Sometimes Marfa’s residents don’t know what to make of these visitors. Music and film festivals have recently given birth to a niche market for the hipster aesthetic, which can be quite a spectacle to see. As one young Marfa boy asked during the 2013 Marfa Film Festival, “Why are all these people wearing costumes?”<sup>314</sup> The costumes to which he was referring were the markers of typical modern day hipsters: unkempt hair, vintage looking baseball socks, cowboy boots, short-shorts, ironic t-shirts, floppy hats, and oversized sunglasses.

As the popularity of these two film festivals grows, so will Marfa’s tourism industry. And as movies continue to be filmed in Marfa, the landscape will become further embedded in the ideology of place in Texas.

## Conclusion

Marfa has established itself as a center of tourism by way of its many varied offerings. Tourists come to Marfa to see the landscape of the Chihuahuan Desert through

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<sup>313</sup> "Interview with Lineaus Lorette." Interview by Jason Oslo Kolker and Rose Anderson-Lewis. *Marfa Oral History Project*. Marfa Public Radio. August 28, 2012.

<sup>314</sup> Interview with Charles Mary Kubricht who was quoting a local boy.

hiking trips and glider rides, they come to witness the Mystery Lights, they travel as military tourists to see what has become of Fort D.A. Russell, and they come as film tourists to experience the places of Marfa-filmed movies. Besides the Chinati and Judd Foundations' tours, there are many other arts and culture offerings throughout the year, not to mention music shows and festivals. Some come to Marfa during the Marfa Lights Festival, an unofficial homecoming for the town's former residents as noted by various natives. Despite the fact that Marfa is not an easy place to get to, it still manages to draw impressive crowds of tourists. These temporary visitors have allowed for small businesses to succeed in Marfa, and the community recognizes the economic importance of its tourism. With the success of tourism in Marfa, the town must react to its changing identity, which changes the experience of place for its residents and visitors. While tourists gaze upon locals, locals return the gaze to the tourists. Those who travel to Marfa for a specific purpose (such as the Trans Pecos Festival of Music + Love) experience a particular kind of Marfa, and this can be quite different than the local's experience. To many locals, Marfa is simply their home, not an exotic place of dense cultural productions. To some tourists, Marfa is so far out of the way that a weekend visit is about all they can stand of a small town's offering. In essence, the experience of place in Marfa is as varied as its residents and its cultural offerings.



39°F, Clear

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It is provided as a service to the Marfa/Big Bend community.

MarfaList does not do any background checks of members. It is up to you, the user, to screen any responses.

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FORUM	TOPICS	POSTS
<b>Immediate</b> The Immediate Forum is for posts needing attention in the next 48 hours. Ex: Headed to Alpine tomorrow, does anyone need anything? Ex: Needing a ride to El Paso tomorrow. The Immediate Forum topics are auto-pruned 48+ hours from the last posting.	8	26
<b>Lost &amp; Found</b> Lost dogs, cats, wallets, keys, love ... you get the idea. When found, please let marfaList users know.	2	6
<b>General</b> The General Forum is for all other posts. There's no time urgency to these. Ex: Bandsaw for sale. \$800. Ex: Needing a ride to the doctor in Midland in 2 months. The General Forum posts last 14 days. You are welcome to re-post as often as needed.	58	96
<b>Events/Gatherings/Happenings</b> ALL Upcoming Events The Events Forum posts last 14 days. You are welcome to re-post as often as needed.	13	20
<b>Real Estate/Housing</b> This Forum is for those looking for housing and real estate options. Rental properties, for sale, housing needed, etc. The Real Estate/Housing Forum posts last 14 days. You are welcome to re-post as often as needed.	4	5
<b>Ride Share</b> Hitch or offer a ride.	13	14

Figure 5.1 Main page of MarfaList.org

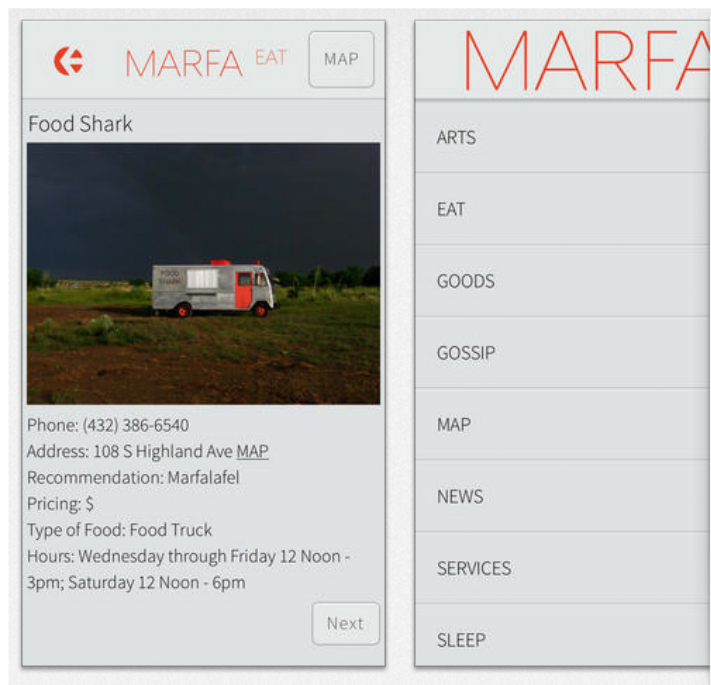


Figure 5.2 The Marfa app for smartphones using one of Judd's boxes for the icon's inspiration

## CHAPTER 6: VISUAL METHODOLOGIES

Throughout the course of my research, I have always seated visual endeavors with the same authority and importance as the printed word, interview, or cultural production in which I have participated. It is by way of visual methodologies – photography, film, painting, watercolor, and pencil, among others – that raw material can be uncovered for contemplation and analysis. I have used the language of geography, anthropology, and art history to place Marfa, and I will add to this here the language of visual expression.

Photography is perhaps the most obvious, and in many ways the most “truthful” visual method of looking at place. Geographers often use photography as factual evidence and data<sup>315</sup> and it is usually in the documentary style that our arguments and discussion can be articulated. Photography is also the most accessible visual method for any researcher, especially in light of the digital revolution. Photographs say what our words cannot; they invoke emotion and experience, and place ideas and landscapes into context. They *back us up*, so to speak, but they are also, in academic research, almost always used as illustrations to the text and not as the product of the research itself.

Contrarily, the problem for the artist arises in the demand for an *artist’s statement*: that insightful, articulate, and not-more-than-one-page! proof of the artist’s intelligence and historical backing. As viewers of art we are overly obsessed with wall-text; we need to be told what we are seeing and why it is important. We trust neither our emotions nor our capacity to translate images into meaning. As students of art and photography, we chuckle at Winogrand’s tongue and cheek statement, but we secretly wish it were our own: “I photograph to find out what something will look like

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<sup>315</sup> Goin, Peter. "Visual Literacy." *Geographical Review* 91, no. 1/2 (2001): 363-69.



photographed.”<sup>316</sup> Or, Nicholas Nixon’s equally succinct writing: “The world is infinitely more interesting than any of my opinions about it.”<sup>317</sup> It is not enough to have an urge, need, obsession with seeing the world through our own lens; we must constantly explain our intentions and ourselves. It is important to edit and challenge ourselves in our work, but when we start to become crippled by it, we have to recognize the need to stop.

The history and development of photography has collapsed into an “ambiguity of postmodern aesthetics”<sup>318</sup> and so it is even in our “real” documentary images that the facts and truths of the photographic image are no longer trusted. By extension, what is to say that a photograph of a landscape can be *more* trustworthy than a painting of the same? Than a sculpture, a poem, a lyric? What is to say that a granite monument to war in Washington, DC holds more meaning than the abandoned airfield in West Texas whose purpose supported that same war? Following Edwards,<sup>319</sup> it is actually in the non-documentary use of photography that images can work for our research. Within this artistic and gestural photography, it is also in the absence of place or person or artifact that meaning can be drawn.

Likewise, to study Marfa in various ways is to constantly engage in an interdisciplinary research, and to treat all methods as equal. The regular actions of day-to-day life while living in Marfa furnished constant material and opportunity, because Marfa is in a constant state of transition. To get out, literally, into the field, as I often did, is to give a quality of realness to my research that cannot be obtained from the abstract or the

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<sup>316</sup> Diamonstein-Spielvogel, Barbaralee, and Harry M. Callahan. *Visions and Images, American Photographers on Photography*. New York: Rizzoli, 1981.

<sup>317</sup> Grundberg, Andy. "Photography View; Nicholas Nixon Seeks a Path to the Heart." *The New York Times*, September 11, 1988.

<sup>318</sup> Mjaaland, Thera. "Evocative Encounters: An Exploration of Artistic Practice as a Visual Research Method." *Visual Anthropology* 22, no. 5 (2009): 393-411.

<sup>319</sup> Edwards, Elizabeth. "Beyond the Boundary: A Consideration of the Expressive in Photography and Anthropology." In *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*, 53-80. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

artificial.<sup>320</sup> My visual methods almost always start with photography, but they don't always end there. By reducing images into simple shapes and colors, the emotional richness of the landscape can be explored in a way that is different than through the documentary photograph. I tend to group images together because it is in the relationship with each other that a more nuanced meaning can be developed and represented. Nothing in the following pages is truth; it is my truth, my Marfa.

Being out *in the field* in order to make photographs or sketches brings the researcher closer to the landscape. There is much to be done in a library with primary and secondary sources, but the contribution of visual arts to the academy must not be overlooked. To add to this, I will say that conducting research and interviews and then reverting inward, physically shutting oneself off from the place of Marfa in an effort to write, ramble and set forth one's ideas pairs well with the act of taking and making photographs or using pen and ink, acrylic, watercolor, and vinyl to visualize these same ideas. In short, when I have needed a break from writing, I have reverted to my visual methodologies, and when I have needed a break from composing visual narratives, I have reverted to my writing.

The images herein are not meant to illustrate the text; they serve as a separate chapter. As I have created and reviewed these images over the past three years, I have given myself another entrance into the landscape and place of Marfa. These images place Marfa into the hands of the viewer, and they do so without words or theory. These are one representation of Marfa, but there are many more. A quick Google image search or Flickr search of Marfa (among other avenues) shows the plethora of documentation and representation that focuses on the place of Marfa. Collectively, these images instill in the

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<sup>320</sup> Zelinsky, Wilbur. "The Geographer as Voyeur." *Geographical Review* 91, no. 1/2 (2001): 1-8.

viewer – whether she has personally traveled to Marfa or is only viewing it from cyberspace – an idea of the Marfa landscape. GIScience has changed the nature and capability of research, and so too has the readily available imagery of place made available online to anyone interested. In this way the place of Marfa becomes even more accessible to an outsider, even while its geographic isolation protects it. The land and the light of Marfa are two of its most noted qualities, and this is visualized in the following pages.

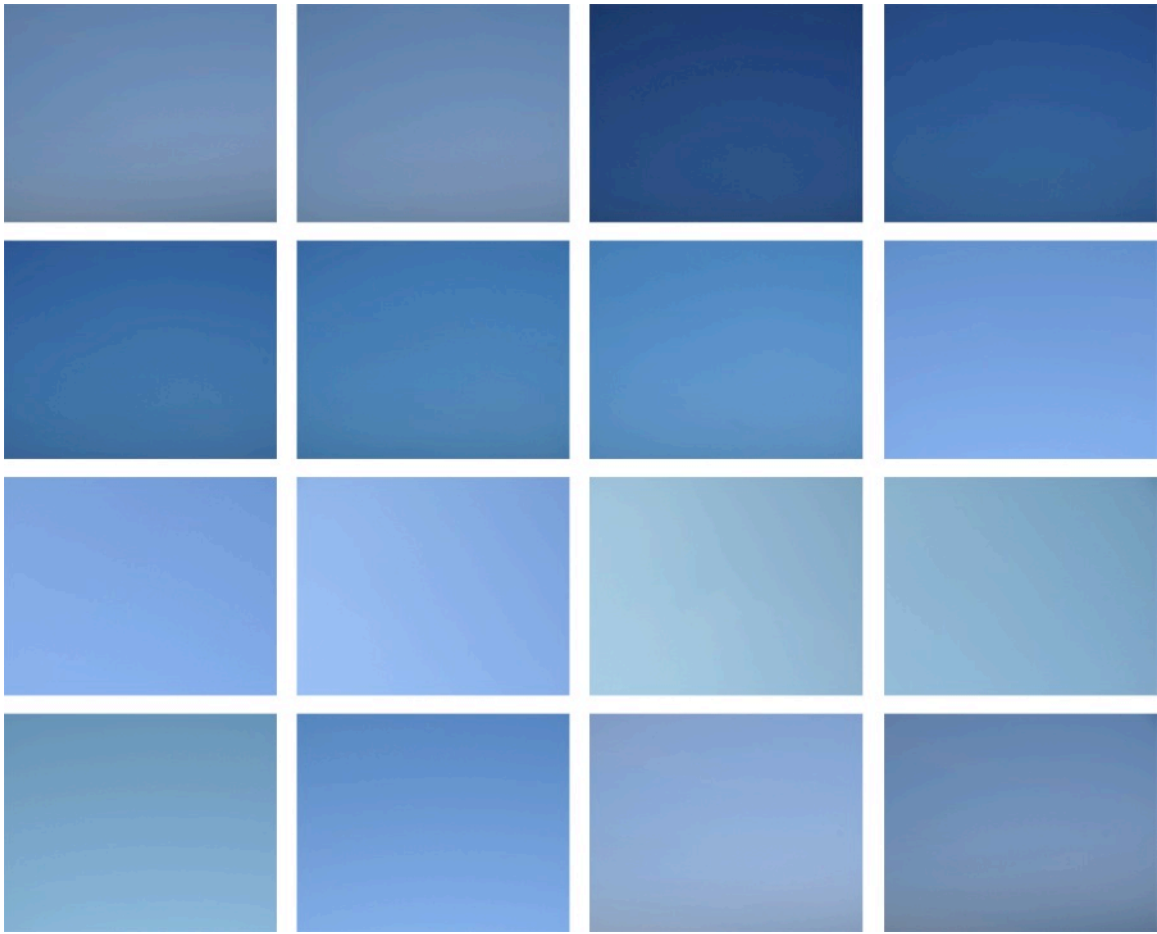


Figure 6.1: Marfa Skies



Figure 6.2 Marfa Landscape



Figure 6.3      Hospital Building of Fort D.A. Russell





Figure 6.4      Foundation Blocks at Marfa Army Airfield



Figure 6.5 Marfa Architecture





Figure 6.6 Ranch Road Sign



Figure 6.7 Marfa Army Airfield





Figure 6.8 Marfa Army Airfield



Figure 6.9      Holiday Inn Capri Sign





Figure 6.10 Marfa Landscape



Figure 6.11 Marfa Home





Figure 6.12 Marfa Home



Figure 6.13 Thunderbird Hotel





Figure 6.14 Gas Station Remodel



Figure 6.15 Marfa Home



Figure 6.16 Marfa Home



Figure 6.17 Former Safeway, now Judd's Studio





Figure 6.18 Marfa Architecture

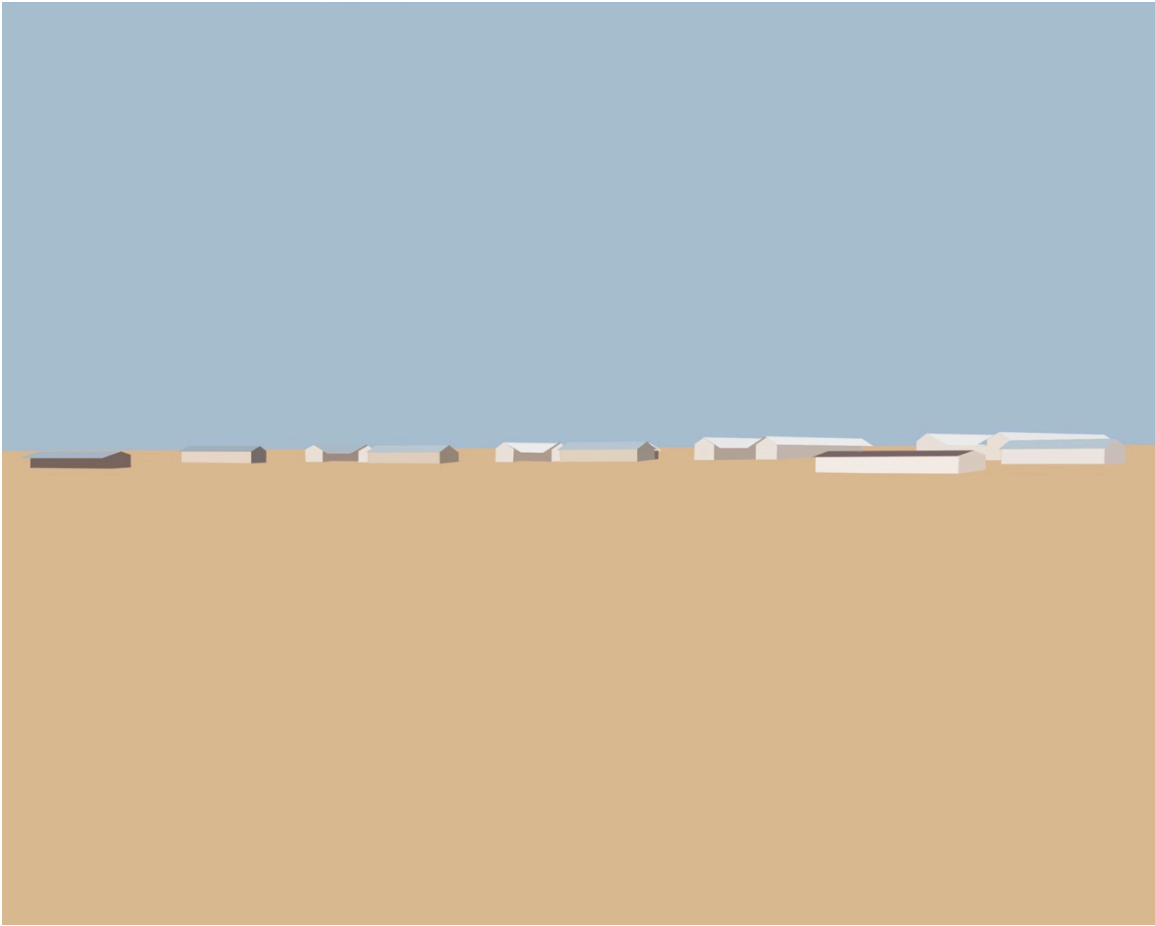


Figure 6.19 The Chinati Foundation



Figure 6.20 Padre's Lot



Figure 6.21 The Block





Figure 6.22 Unused Railway

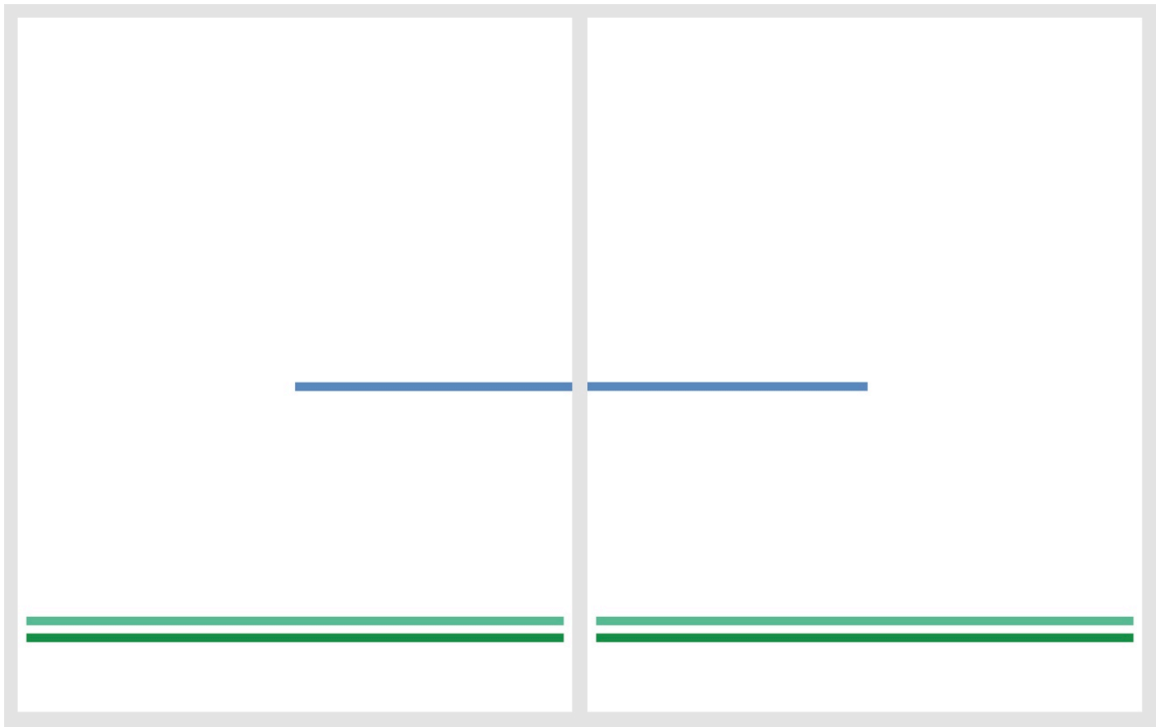


Figure 6.23 Marfa Landscape

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

### Visualization of Data

As word of mouth grew about Marfa, newspaper and magazine articles slowly started to add to its identity and to attract visitors, curious to see for themselves this strange, small town in west Texas. Visually, a timeline of important media attention and events that continue to shape Marfa's cultural importance to an outside world can be drawn, and further, this information can be related to housing and tax information. Together, these data point to significant growth in Marfa in the time since Judd's death.

While it is hard to carve out an exact linear narrative of how this happened, it is possible to begin to piece together the story by looking at dates. Figure 7.1 shows the relationship between events and media records since 1983.<sup>321</sup> This information was compiled by joining two LexisNexis pulls of "Marfa" (July and October 2013)<sup>322</sup> with a timeline of major events and business openings (Appendix B).<sup>323</sup> The articles range from magazine, newspaper, radio, and online journals discussing art, tourism, the environment, the border, the Marfa Mystery Lights, and so on. The timeline combines local business and foundation openings with major or significant events.

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<sup>321</sup> 1983 is the earliest article written on Marfa from the LexisNexis pull. The story, "Marfans for Marfa," details a community gathering to watch a Kentucky Derby race, where a horse named Marfa, owned by a local breeder and rancher, is racing.

<sup>322</sup> I chose to combine two separate LexisNexis pulls because I was curious to see if there would be any changes in the information returned between July and October. The second pull generated a handful of recent articles but mostly repeated the information generated from July as I had suspected.

<sup>323</sup> A starting year of 1986 was chosen because this is the year that the Chinati Foundation officially opened. Other places in Marfa have been open much longer: Christopher's home furnishing store has been open for 79 years and Livingston Ranch Supplies has been open for a similar length. Both stores are worth walking into to see a piece of Marfa's living history. Borunda's Bar & Grill is said to be the first restaurant in Texas to serve Mexican fare, first opening in 1892.

It is apparent from Figure 7.1 that the outside attention given to Marfa in recent years has grown considerably, but we can break this down further. In Figure 7.2, I've separated out the data from LexisNexis into five primary subjects: art, film, local, politics, and travel. The colored columns indicate these subjects for each year. Next, I added a secondary component to every media piece: Art – Flavin, general, Judd, Playboy Marfa, Prada Marfa, style, tourism; Film – general, Giant, Marfa Girl, tourism; Local – environment, general, Mystery Lights; Politics – general, the border; Travel – general, music, style, tourism. The secondary subject is indicated in text on the columns (if record numbers are great enough). My method was admittedly a subjective one, as I was the one to decide the primary and secondary subject of each media piece after reading it. The goal in using and visualizing this data was to be neither too general nor too specific, prompting the decision to use only two subjects to describe each piece. The raw data for this figure can be seen in Appendix C.<sup>324</sup>

The trend first visualized in Figure 7.1 is furthered through Figure 7.2, essentially adding a more nuanced level of detail. When reviewing major events in Marfa's recent history, the correlation to media attention is visible. For example, the Redford goatherder killing was in 1997, and media attention related to the border spiked that year. In 2000, Dan Flavin's installation at the Chinati Foundation was completed, sparking an increase in media attention specific to that year. Tourism, travel, openings, and style are consistent subjects in the last ten years. Figure 7.3 is using the same data to visualize the primary and secondary subjects in a different way.

With each event or business opening in Marfa, specifically the incoming foundations and their staff, another round of media attention gave outsider focus on

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<sup>324</sup> In an effort not to overload the reader, I've hidden the author and source for each media piece.

Marfa. Regularly scheduled cultural programming placed Marfa on the global map for these new reasons outside of Judd. What these components add up to is the contemporary Marfa scene, one that most notably no longer relies on Donald Judd's vision. While there is not a lot of activity before 1994 (the year of Judd's death), the increase in events and media attention since this time is consistent and growing.

The popularity of Marfa has contributed to the increase in property value (Figure 7.4), and this has caused a backlash from locals who cannot afford the rising tax rates. However, there are homestead and disability exemptions that some locals are able to take advantage of. The success of Marfa is essentially a Catch-22 for its residents, who lament the lack of funds for smaller, local needs in the face of outsider grants and funding that is given to the non-profit foundations. One local woman hates the fact that streetlights were shut off in 2008 to save the city the \$3,126 dollar monthly electrical bill, and says that Marfa "needs more things besides art." Marfa may very well need things besides art, but it is beholden to the economic benefits that come with this art, that make the name Marfa refer to a particular style.

## **The Marfa Style**

In the twenty years since Donald Judd's death, Marfa's identity has dramatically evolved. What started with Judd's vision of a unique museum in this remote oasis has led to the small town's acclaim as an internationally recognized place of art and culture, set amidst a backdrop of beautiful landscape and incredible light. The irony is perhaps in the popularity of Marfa itself as a destination, for the appeal of Marfa to the masses has no doubt created a steady catalyst for change, welcomed or not. The more that Marfa changes, the further it arguably gets from its original appeal, not only to Donald Judd but

to every other native or newcomer who has lived and witnessed the changes taking place in Marfa in recent years. That being said, locals are often quick to acknowledge that Marfa's sustainability is due in large part to these very changes. Based on an understanding of who the person Donald Judd was, it is not without reason to speculate that he would have hated what Marfa has become. Or, perhaps, after acknowledging that he had "put Marfa and Presidio County on the art-world map"<sup>325</sup> he would have retreated to one of his ranches outside of town<sup>326</sup> and secluded himself, or moved on to other projects that took him away from Marfa and west Texas altogether.

What is to say that Marfa has become the place it is not in spite of but because of Judd's death? During his time in Marfa he was "not politically active, wasn't embraced, and was thought to be eccentric."<sup>327</sup> His longtime assistant and Associate Director of Chinati remarked of Judd's death, "The town became something else as a result."<sup>328</sup> Dan Flavin's contributing piece and cornerstone to the museum's collection may never have been completed had Judd been alive, because the two had stopped speaking. The Chinati Foundation now runs on grants and donations and not the largesse of the artist himself, as it had during his lifetime.<sup>329</sup> Sometimes an artist can get in his own way, and it is in death that a more in-depth analysis and appreciation of work can be done, with a different sort of reverence to the work and artist.

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<sup>325</sup> Butcher, Sterry. "Service Saturday for Donald Judd." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa), February 17, 1994.

<sup>326</sup> Though not discussed in this dissertation, Judd had acquired nearly 40,000 acres of ranch land in the surrounding Chihuahuan Desert. The Judd Foundation maintains the ranches although they are not available for public tours.

<sup>327</sup> Interview with Cecilia Thompson.

<sup>328</sup> Interview with Rob Weiner.

<sup>329</sup> There are too many grants to herein name, but Chinati's website has an exhaustive list of over sixty major supporters: [www.chinati.org/information/funding.php](http://www.chinati.org/information/funding.php)

By way of the establishment and mission of the Judd Foundation, Judd's studio and living space have become fetishized, and his personal spaces are presented not as living, changing spaces but as stagnant, frozen ones. And as one Marfa artist aptly described to me, the Chinati Foundation is not a contemporary museum – it is a historical museum presenting “the vision of Donald Judd.”<sup>330</sup> Today, the spaces of Marfa removed from Judd are contrastingly very much alive, changing at the hands of other artists and community members. Where Marfa's transformation began with Donald Judd's vision, the work of later residents, particularly Tim Crowley but also countless other members of the community, native or not, have ultimately contributed to a newer, modern vision of Marfa.

The more that Marfa has become recognized as a tourist destination, be it via film, nature, art, or Mystery Lights-based, the further it gets from its ranching heritage – but this kind of heritage had already been harming the landscape for many years, and the cycle of drought has not helped. In reviewing Marfa's history, it seems that change was the conduit that allowed the town's sustainability in the first place – first with the ranchers, then with the military, now with the art. The changes that have taken place both economically and culturally in Marfa in the last twenty years have allowed it to sustain its economy without a direct dependence on the productivity of the land, and this has allowed a community-wide recognition of landscape and landscape preservation that permeate the town's culture. This is evidenced by the growing body of cultural productions that focus on these topics, and to the community's desire to keep the landscape of west Texas intact. (For instance, the community has rallied to keep away an increase in Air Force bomber routes through the area and a proposed radioactive waste

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<sup>330</sup> Stockebrand, Marianne, Donald Judd, and Rudi Fuchs. *Chinati: The Vision of Donald Judd*. Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation, 2010.

dump in Sierra Blanca.)<sup>331</sup> Apart from these various economic changes to its recent history, Marfa has also been home to various cultural identities within the community: the ranchers, the Hispanics, and the artists. These groups cohabitate together in a small town setting, and their interests and activities often, but not always, allow them to cross paths. Only history will tell what kind of place Marfa will be in another twenty years, but its geographic remoteness and placement near the border will continue to affect the culture and community.

As I've researched the artists and designers who have come to be associated with Marfa, I've often wondered whether or not they share similar beliefs as Donald Judd or if they have taken an entirely different path in their work. The foundations in Marfa and the global influence of Donald Judd's place here have come to signify the place of Marfa as a place of clean, minimal lines, and this has been reflected specifically in the architecture and furniture produced there. Likewise, the consumable work produced in Marfa is a reflection of its identity, and as it is dispersed into the outside world, it carries with it this meaning. When we purchase something that we believe to be beautiful, that fits with our own aesthetic, we also impose on the work the placing of its origin, and this becomes a part of the work. We don't just buy a dress; we buy a hand embroidered Oaxacan dress from the place of its origin in Mexico. It is this kind of authenticity that makes the physical, commercial object special to us.

When we purchase something from Marfa, we invest in our belief that Marfa is a special place, where the environment is inspirational to its creators. This work is then dispersed beyond Marfa's borders, and carries with it the meaning of Marfa. With

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<sup>331</sup> De La Garza, Paul. "A Nuclear Waste Dump Becomes A Border Issue." *Chicago Tribune*, October 19, 1998; Lyman, Rick. "For Some, Texas Town Is Too Popular as Waste Disposal Site." *The New York Times*, September 2, 1998; Haines, Tom. "Air Force Changing Bomber Training Runs over Far West Texas." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa), January 20, 2011; Haines, Tom. "Ranchers Challenge Air Force Plans for Bomber Routes." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa), January 27, 2011.



Marfa's constantly expanding and shifting identity into a place of tourism and a place that provides cultural capital, this dispersal of identity and goods includes the commoditization of Marfa. Hence, beyond the idea of the landscape, there is also now a dependence on the name Marfa and what that culturally means to the town as a place.

There are many businesses that have recognized this opportunity and have contributed to the branding of Marfa, and collectively they have been able to outsource this branding to the outside world – not to mention sustain their own commercial and private ventures. The practical and beautiful designs of Jamey and Constance Garza and Joey Benton represent the place of Marfa. Despite the fact that these locals have been able to sustain successful design studios in Marfa directly because of its growing popularity (and the home and business renovations that come with it), their success, and the success of Marfa's style, has allowed them to export their goods to distant, larger consumer markets. The demand for their products is also a demand for a piece of this Marfa style, a piece of Marfa itself.

Following Verbeek,<sup>332</sup> the material quality of the products developed in and in the name of Marfa have more to do with the sign they convey and less to do with their actual functionality. Just as *Prada Marfa*'s creators wanted their work to be associated to the name and place of Marfa (without actually installing the work in Marfa), other artists, designers and brands have done the same. "Made in Marfa" is a desirable label, but not all products need this authenticity. While some products carrying the Marfa name are authentically made *in* Marfa (such as Ginger Griffice's Marfa Brand soaps) others merely coopt the name for branding. Each time this is done, the branding of Marfa becomes that much further embedded.

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<sup>332</sup> Verbeek, Peter-Paul. *What Things Do: Philosophical Reflections on Technology, Agency, and Design*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005.

MadeWell, a lifestyle and clothing company owned by J.Crew, released in its 2013 summer catalogue two versions of “the Marfa Bag.” One is a bucket purse with a Mexican-inspired print and tan leather, and the second is a rectangular, darker tan leather purse with minimal detail. They both have a “found-at-the-flea-market-vibe” (for \$118 and \$135, respectively)<sup>333</sup> and both feature a zigzag imprint on parts of the leather. The bags are marketed to women and they are not made in Marfa – not even made in the United States. Can you picture what they might look like before seeing them? (Figure 7.5). The Marfa Bag is appropriating the style of Marfa, but it is also perpetuating, and building on, the same Marfa style from which it takes. Because of the mass-market reach of the J.Crew brand, the use of the name Marfa in these two handbags undercuts what the actual people of Marfa do to create and maintain their unique identities. Further, anyone purchasing this bag that may or may not have heard of Marfa has bought into the commercialization of the name. They have absorbed the idea of the Marfa identity without actually having needed to experience the place.

Unlike a conglomerate such as J.Crew, some Marfa locals are defining the style of Marfa more authentically. One of these pieces of Marfa can be had for the price of \$495 and a six- to eight- month waiting period due to its popularity and the labor required for its creation. The “South Highland Boot” (Figure 7.6) is the only shoe in production by the Cobra Rock Boot Company,<sup>334</sup> although there are plans to expand with future designs. The owners, Colt Miller and Logan Caldbeck, make each pair in Marfa by hand. While this type of luxury good is perhaps accessible only to those with a large disposable income, it is exactly the type of export that allows Marfa’s identity to be dispersed to the

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<sup>333</sup> Source:

[https://www.madewell.com/madewell\\_category/BAGS/crossbodybags/PRDOVR~01149/01149.jsp](https://www.madewell.com/madewell_category/BAGS/crossbodybags/PRDOVR~01149/01149.jsp) and  
[https://www.madewell.com/madewell\\_category/BAGS/crossbodybags/PRDOVR~01147/01147.jsp](https://www.madewell.com/madewell_category/BAGS/crossbodybags/PRDOVR~01147/01147.jsp)

<sup>334</sup> <http://www.cobrarock.com/>

outside world in a unique way. Tourists don't want to travel to expected places to buy cheap souvenirs that were made in a factory in Taiwan. The modern tourist is interested in unique experiences, and with these unique experiences come special types of souvenirs that tell a story and speak very specifically to the place in which they were purchased. The South Highland boot is a way for the tourist to bring a different kind of Marfa home with him, and it is a way for the place of Marfa to be dispersed outside of Marfa, even if through a receptacle as simple (and commercial) as a boot.

The impact of souvenirs and of items specifically purchased in a particular place should not be overlooked.<sup>335</sup> Not only are the boots practical, but they also support a small business in a small town. This is a win for both parties: it is a win for the business owners, as they are able to support themselves, and it is a win for the tourist, as he is able to take with him the emotions and experience originally had in the place by way of the object. The exportation of the product to places outside of Marfa carries with it the idea of Marfa and contributes to an outsider's understanding of place, and it also allows a small business the chance to succeed. On the other hand, these boots can perhaps alienate most residents of Marfa because most residents of Marfa cannot afford to buy them: the median income of a Marfa resident in 2010 was \$33,950.<sup>336</sup>

Some of the products that use the Marfa name are not as authentic as others, meaning they are not handmade and/or they are not made in Marfa, but they do contribute to the placing of Marfa to the outside and to the identity of Marfa. Pure Marfa<sup>337</sup> sells all

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<sup>335</sup> See Hitchcock, Michael, and Ken Teague. *Souvenirs: The Material Culture of Tourism*. Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2000; Wilkins, Hugh. "Souvenirs: What and Why We Buy." *Journal of Travel Research* 50, no. 3 (2011): 239-47; and Littrell, Mary Ann, Luella F. Anderson, and Pamela J. Brown. "What Makes a Craft Souvenir Authentic?" *Annals of Tourism Research* 20, no. 1 (1993): 197-215.

<sup>336</sup> 2010 U.S. Census

<sup>337</sup> <http://www.puremarfa.com/>

of its products online and its items are curated to “represent the vibe of Marfa”<sup>338</sup> as defined by “clean lines, rough textures and raw materials.”<sup>339</sup> Mid Century Marfa<sup>340</sup> sells vintage clothing online and also has a small space above the Tumbleweed laundry. Other stores currently open such as Freda,<sup>341</sup> Tienda M and the Velvet Antler<sup>342</sup> curate goods that ostensibly reflect the style and place of Marfa. Local Marfa artists make most of the goods sold in these stores while some are imported from just across the border.

These businesses all contribute to creating the identity of Marfa as it is exported to the outside world, but this is not without its challenges. Because Marfa remains a small town with a cyclical and temporal filling and emptying of visitors, maintaining a business that caters to outsiders by selling non-essential items is a risky operation. In the six years since I first came to Marfa, I’ve seen restaurants and shops open and close with such regularity that I now react to a new store with an almost cynical contempt, and this as someone who doesn’t even live in Marfa. In fact, the types of businesses no longer available in Marfa are noteworthy: there hasn’t been a pharmacy in Marfa since 1998, and there is no dentist, no dry cleaner. When I lived in Marfa in 2011, I had to make a 7-hour round-trip to visit an allergist. The lack of these more practical businesses in Marfa protects it from too much growth, but residents lament not having the conveniences previously afforded to them. It is often seen as a small concession to pay in order to live in such a beautiful place.

Besides the very straightforward commercial ventures in Marfa, there is a wealth of cultural productions that seek to investigate design, architectural, environmental and

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<sup>338</sup> <http://business.marfacc.com/list/category/shopping-8>

<sup>339</sup> <http://www.puremarfa.com/pages/about-us>

<sup>340</sup> <http://www.midcenturymarfa.com/>

<sup>341</sup> <http://shop-freda.com/pages/frontpage>

<sup>342</sup> <http://velvetantlermarfa.blogspot.com/>

political issues in Marfa and in the greater Big Bend region. Symposiums such as Design Marfa<sup>343</sup> and the Marfa Dialogues<sup>344</sup> create an opportunity for these larger discussions to take place, and Marfa's environmental factors and geographic placement near the border almost demand it. These types of location- and place-based events take the brand Marfa and turn it into a catalyst for change. This is what will continue to make Marfa special as a destination for new residents and tourists. A community that is engaged with relevant issues, like land and water use or border issues, will also define its very space through the production of these events, and that will continue to make the cultural identity of Marfa that much richer. These events will also allow Marfa to continue sustaining itself as a small town in west Texas. The challenge for Marfa as a community is in finding a balance between all of these products and ventures that use the town's popularity and culture for self-promotion. "When a town becomes a product and not a vision you lose something."<sup>345</sup> Can Marfa protect itself from itself? In the summer of 2013, an installation gave the community of Marfa the opportunity to show that it can.

### **Commodity from the Strange: *Playboy Marfa***

Some eight years after *Prada Marfa*'s installation there appeared a new sculpture on Route 90, the highway that leads into Marfa from the west. Only this sculpture represented a modern Marfa, the Marfa that is a style, a brand, and its creator was more than willing to take part in the spectacle. *Playboy Marfa*'s three elements – a simple, concrete box-like structure, a 1972 Dodge Charger painted entirely matte black, and a

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<sup>343</sup> <http://www.designmarfa.com/>

<sup>344</sup> <http://www.marfadialogues.org/>

<sup>345</sup> Nelson, Andrew, and Stephanie Corley. "Showdown in Marfa." *Salon*, August 1, 2005. <http://www.salon.com/2005/08/01/marfa/>.

large, white, neon sign – make a clear connection to the original artists of the Chinati Foundation: Donald Judd, John Chamberlain, and Dan Flavin (Figure 7.7). What was most noticeable about this installation, however, was the shape of its neon sign – the very recognizable “bunny” logo of Playboy – that was nothing more than an advertisement to the brand. *Playboy Marfa* was commissioned and paid for by Playboy, thereby questioning its deceptive claim of being merely “art.”

The installation, designed by Richard Phillips, was approved by Presidio County and put in place over the course of a couple of days in July 2013. Rightfully guessing that Playboy was up to something controversial, *The Big Bend Sentinel* broke the story before the company’s formal press release.<sup>346</sup> Marfans had hoped, or at least I did, that the installation was going to mean something more than it did. Unfortunately, it was revealed that Playboy’s interest in coopting the core artists of the Chinati Foundation (and by extension, Marfa) was no more than an effort to reinvigorate the brand – it was simply an advertisement. The silver lining to this advertisement’s dark cloud was its temporariness; the plans specified it would be up for one year,<sup>347</sup> however, the locals’ immediate criticism of the piece prompted its removal in November. It was then transferred to the Dallas Contemporary, where it will be installed as part of a 2014 show of Richard Phillips’ work.<sup>348</sup>

The community’s rejection of *Playboy Marfa* initially took flight when Marfa local Lineaus Lorette filed a complaint with the Texas Department of Transportation almost immediately after its installation, citing the sculpture as advertisement. However,

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<sup>346</sup> Halpern, Alberto Tomas. "Playboy to Erect Sculpture near Marfa." *Big Bend Sentinel*. 30 May 2013. Web. Accessed 02 July 2013.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Wallace, Terry. "'Playboy Marfa' Bunny Logo to Be Moved to Dallas Museum." *Associated Press*, November 15, 2013.

the agency had already come to that conclusion without his help.<sup>349</sup> The neon bunny was a corporate logo and thus in violation of the Highway Beautification Act of 1965. The sculpture was cited as illegal advertising and Playboy was given 45 days to remove it. Playboy wouldn't budge, but at that point the media attention given to the piece had already fulfilled (likely beyond their wildest dreams) what the corporation had been after all along: press and advertisement. What's more, *Prada Marfa* was dragged into the battle, as it had also been cited by the Texas Department of Transportation as an illegal advertisement.<sup>350</sup> And so both installations' fates became unknown. The forced removal of either would put a new spin on each installation, but more importantly, on the status of Marfa as a cultural center. Playboy's attorney in the case happens to be a part-time Marfa resident, Dick DeGuerin, who says that *Playboy Marfa* is "provocative, yes, but a contribution to the overall art scene in Marfa."<sup>351</sup> The battle ultimately shows that, to Marfans, there is a fine line between a contribution to and a desecration of place. Perhaps *Playboy Marfa* was merely the straw that broke the proverbial camel's back, prompting much of the community to reject it (Figure 7.8).

Whereas the works of the Chinati Foundation, from which Phillips drew his inspiration, are permanent, site-specific pieces, *Playboy Marfa* will be reinstalled outside of Marfa. It is not permanent, not site-specific. It will mean something entirely different when installed in Dallas. *Playboy Marfa* will be a meta-representation of Marfa, coopting

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<sup>349</sup> Mari, Francesca. "What Is Art? Can a Bunny in the Desert Tell Us?" *Texas Monthly*, November 2013.

<sup>350</sup> Mari, Francesca. "Maybe This Is Why Warhol Stuck to Soup Cans." *The New York Times*, September 14, 2013. However, Texas DOT has not ordered its removal, and is not expected to. Its creators maintain that there is a difference between using a logo in a piece of art that is not paid for by the corporation to using a logo in a piece of art this is paid for by the corporation.

<sup>351</sup> Vasquez, Sarah. "With Help of Attorney DeGuerin, Playboy Bunny Remains Standing." *The Big Bend Sentinel* (Marfa), August 15, 2013.

its landscape and art but removed from the source materials' inspiration and meaning. It will place Marfa outside of Marfa, situated as a spectacle in a distant museum.

Does the removal of *Playboy Marfa* signal the limit of the amount of exploitation Marfa residents can take? The controversy does open up a dialogue about art and advertising, but it also shows a community outraged by the commoditization of its landscape and culture. If *Prada Marfa* is ever to be removed in the backlash of *Playboy Marfa*'s controversy (although at the moment it looks to be in the clear), gone is the irony of a luxury brand in the middle of nowhere. Lovers of the work would lament its demise, haters of the work would claim victory, and locals who never cared about it in the first place would remain unaffected.

### **Prospects for Future Research**

Throughout this writing I have traced the evolution of Marfa from its earliest days of ranching and the railroad to its contemporary identity as a cultural hotspot. The identity of Marfa is today reliant on the work of Donald Judd, who built an alternative museum there, but the real story of Marfa in many ways begins in the post-Judd era with the arrival of newcomers and non-profit foundations. These new members of the community have allowed Marfa to further evolve into a place of art, music, film, and by way of these features, tourism. As opposed to other cities that continue to grow in size and numbers, Marfa's population has hovered at two thousand for the past fourteen years, and it is not expected to change any time soon. Marfa's geography, its placement in west Texas in the dry and harsh terrain of the Chihuahuan Desert, is what will protect it from too much growth.



Small towns can be some of the most progressive places because the members are forced to know each other, and by extension they are forced to get along. Marfa is a progressive small town. Despite the varying priorities and interests of its Hispanic, ranching and arts-focused residents, Marfa remains a pleasant and friendly town that continues to attract visitors. Its cultural programming, border politics, and environmental challenges have also continued to attract steady media attention, which further serves to focus interest and curiosity from outsiders. Marfa may be remote, but it is not isolated.

The landscape of Marfa has been described and explored, as well as the spaces of Judd's making. There is much more work that can be done on Marfa, and this can take several forms. First, an economic analysis of its businesses should be realized, to determine how much of the tourist dollar contributes to the economy of Marfa. The length of time that each business is and has been open in Marfa should also be analyzed, because these spaces in Marfa tend to open as often as they close. Second, a thorough review of artists making work in Marfa, inspired by its landscape, would make an excellent case study. This can take the form of William Fox's *Mapping the Empty: Eight Artists and Nevada*, and would provide an avenue to explore the visual work that is being done in Marfa post-Judd. Third, a study of its Hispanic population should be done, focusing on their jobs and their lives, which are often entirely removed from the popular culture associated with Marfa. Lastly, and with the help of online research tools such as Survey Monkey, an extended report on the tourism in Marfa should be done, over the course of at least ten years, to determine how this new identity has affected both visitors and residents. These are just a few ideas for future research but I am certain that other scholars will find their own paths that relate to Marfa. Certainly as Marfa continues to evolve it will find itself asking new questions and facing new challenges. As one local noted, "You can't preserve Marfa as a dollhouse," but the participation of Marfa's

community members will be essential in sustaining the qualities that have always drawn its residents and visitors – the landscape and the light.

My first visit to Marfa brought me through El Paso, via USAirways, and so that was my initial entrance to the landscape. Since then, I've come to Marfa from Austin, a six-hour drive. It's a different feeling to come to Marfa from Austin, as the direction of travel is in the same direction taken by the original white homesteaders. With each westward town is a new founding date, pushing against the timeline of history. There are many small towns to pass along the way – Johnson City, Stonewall, Harper, Junction – and my goal has always been Marfa, so I've invested few minutes in these other places. There is, in reality, so much to see. As I head back east on Route 17 towards Austin from Marfa's center, I say goodbye to the Marfa Mystery Lights, goodbye to the hidden army airfield, goodbye to the railroad, and goodbye to the calm and bright Marfa Plateau. No one is seeing me off – I have always crept out as quietly as I have crept in – but I've learned a lot and I hope that I've proposed new ways to think about Marfa to its residents, and to those who come in search of the land and the light. I'll be within range of Marfa Public Radio for about an hour; after that I'll need to scan for something new.

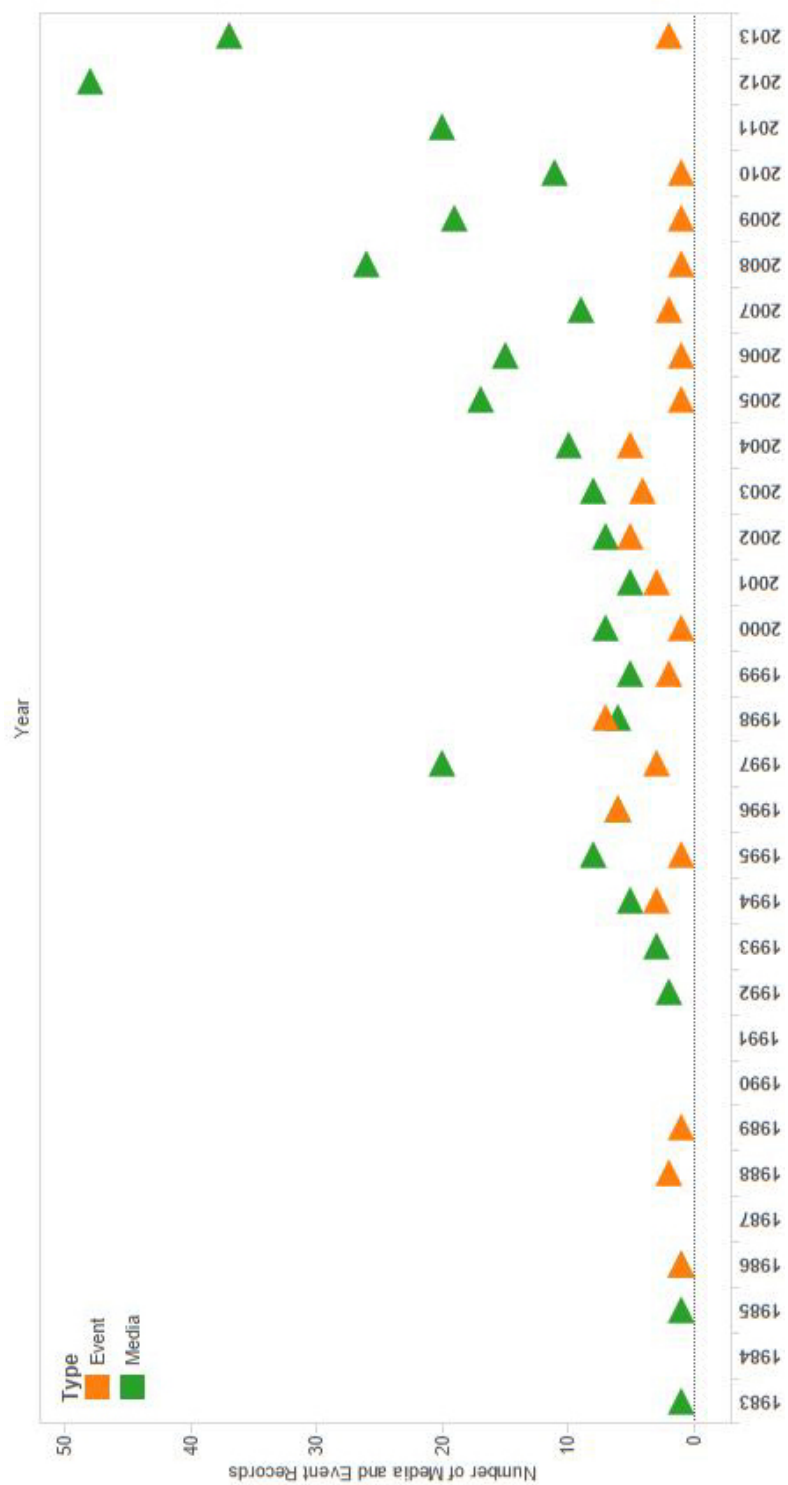


Figure 7.1: Event (Timeline) and Media (LexisNexis) chart

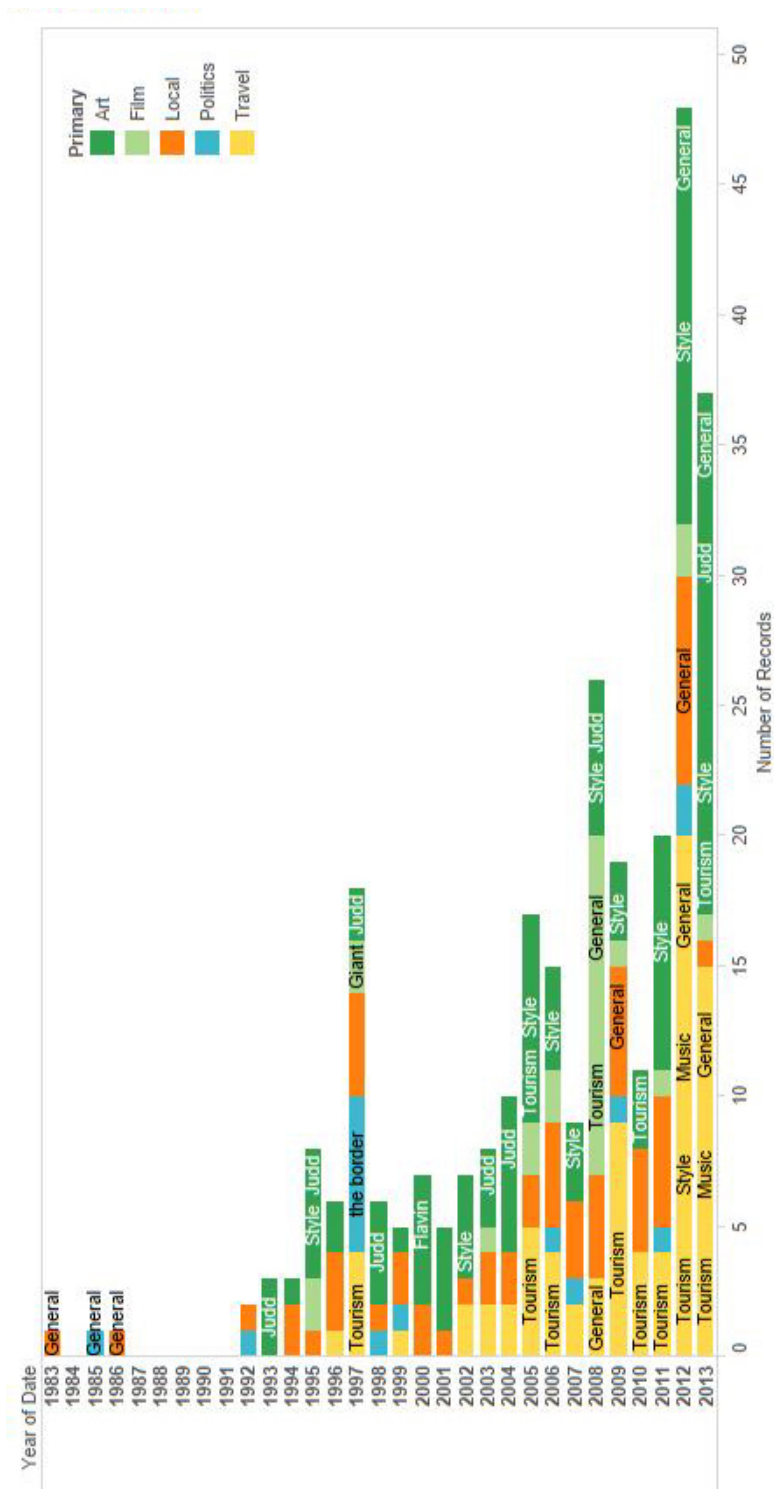


Figure 7.2: LexisNexis bar chart

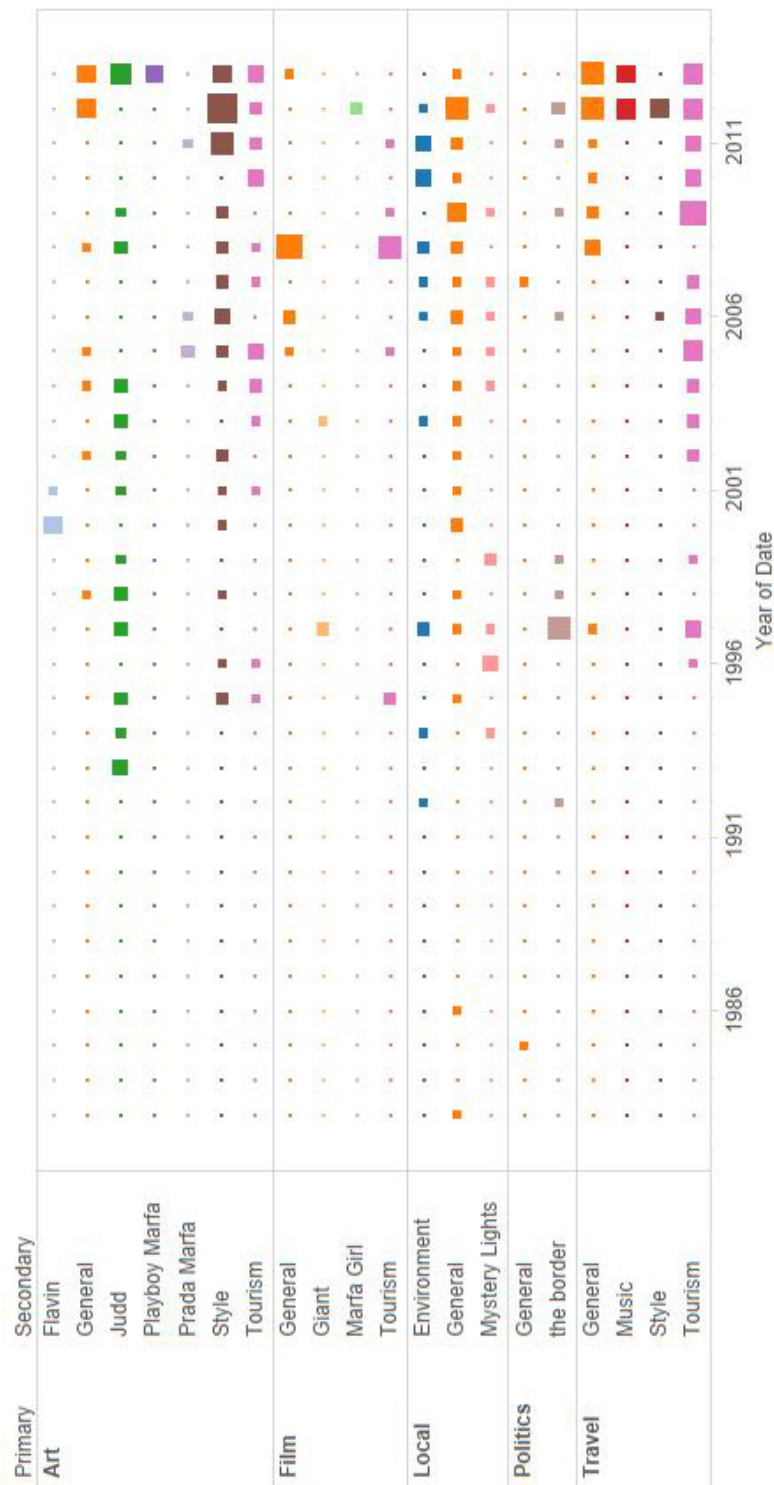


Figure 7.3: LexisNexis square chart

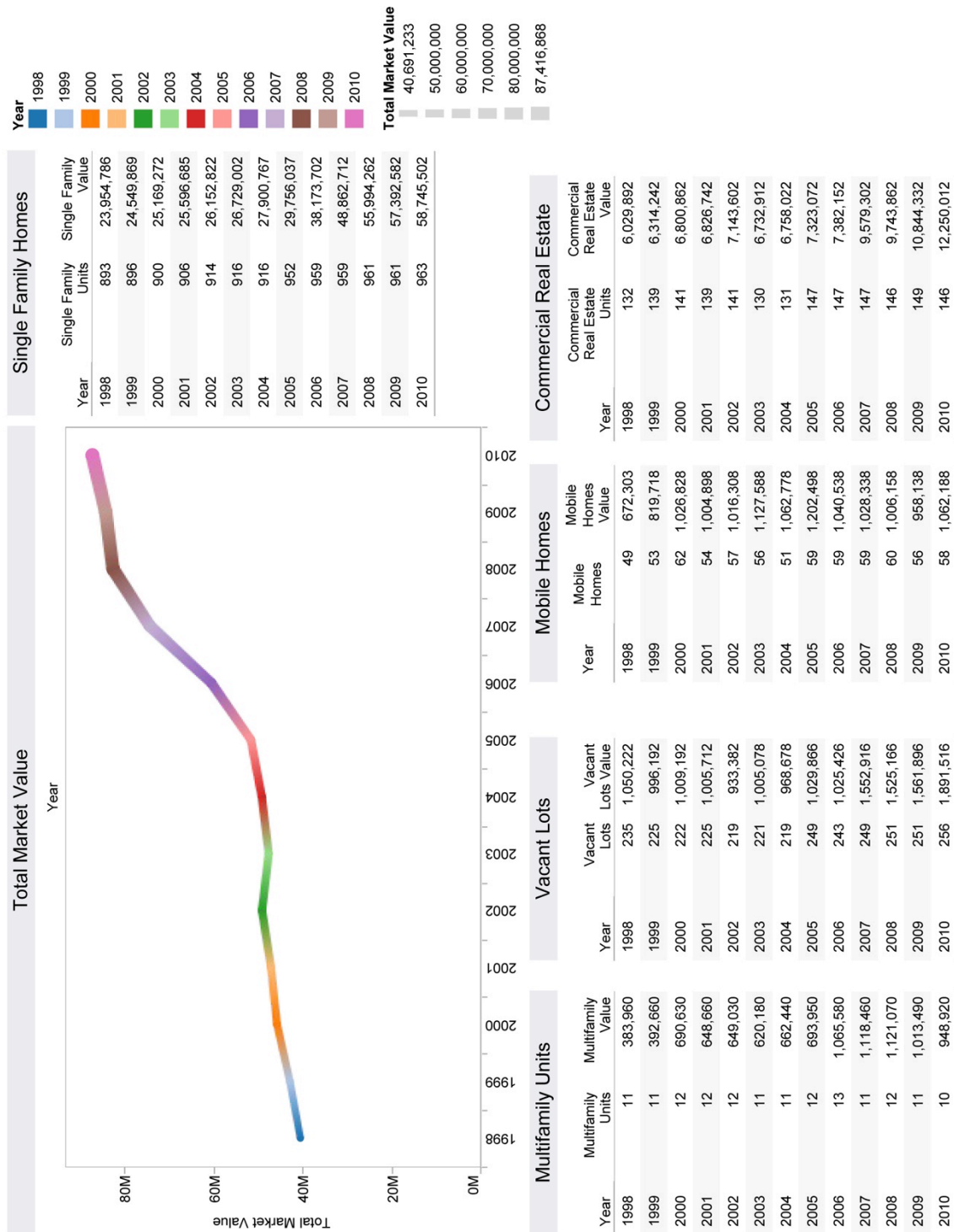


Figure 7.4: Total Market Real Estate Value 1998-2010



Figure 7.5: Two versions of “The Marfa Bag” by MadeWell, from website



Figure 7.6: The South Highland Boot, from [blog.arrowandarrow.com](http://blog.arrowandarrow.com)



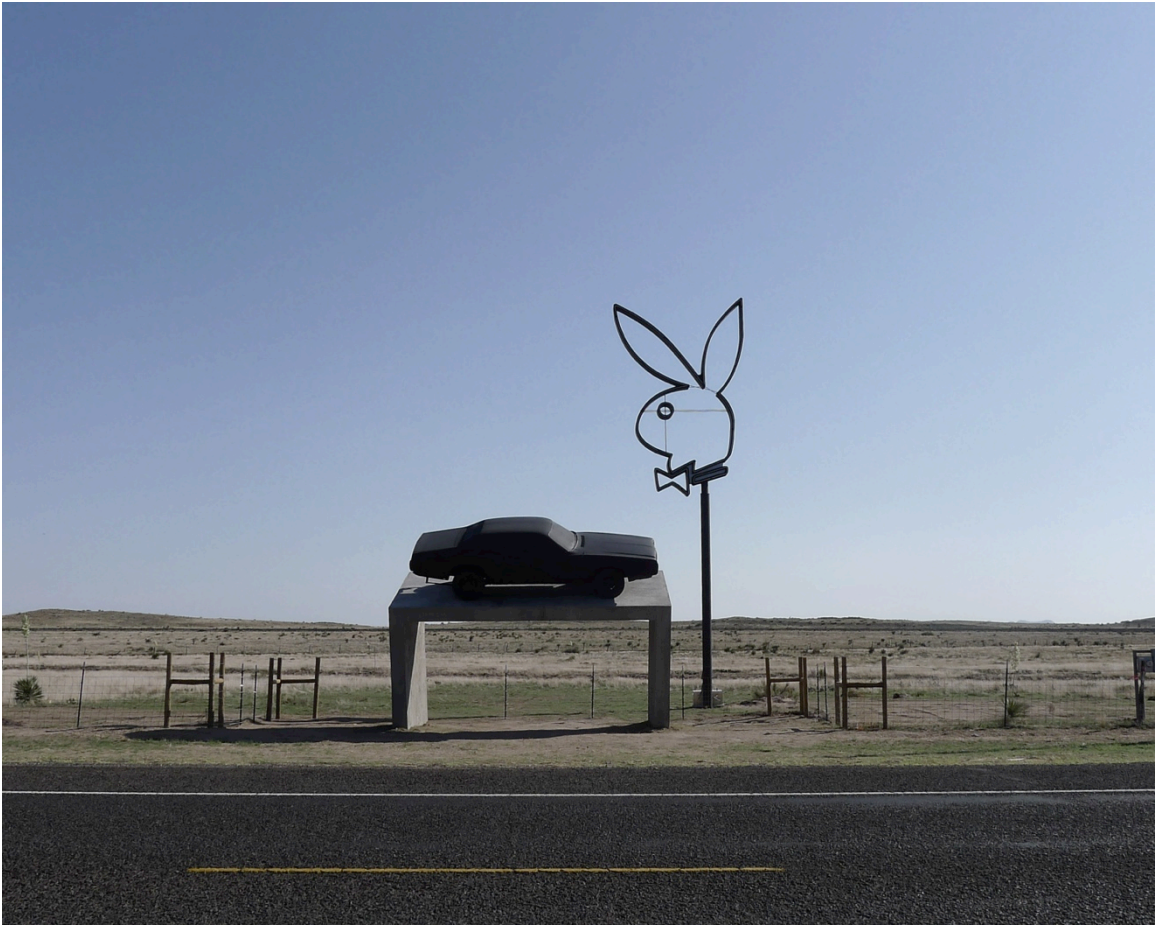


Figure 7.7: *Playboy Marfa* in 2013, by author



Figure 7.8: Sticker printed by local artist Julie Speed in 2013

## Appendix A: List of structured and semi-structured interviews

1	Alyce Santoro	23	Fairfax Dorn	45	Mary Shaffer
2	Ann Dunlap	24	Georgie Lee Kahl	46	Melissa McDonnell
3	Armando Vasquez	25	Ginger Griffice	47	Mike DeGiglio
4	Berta	26	Gory Smelley	48	Nicki Ittner
5	Bill Brooks	27	Hilary DuPont	49	Pat Quin
6	Boyd Elder	28	Ike Livingston	50	Rachel Osier Lindley
7	Burt Compton	29	Jamey Garza	51	Retired Border Patrolman
8	Carl Robinson	30	JD DiFabbio	52	Rob Crowley
9	Carlos Lujan	31	Jerek	53	Rob Weiner
10	Cecilia Thompson	32	Jimmy Rodewald	54	Robert Arber
11	Charles Mary Kubricht	33	Joe Cabezuela	55	Ross Cashiola
12	Chip Love	34	Joey Benton	56	Roy
13	Colt Miller	35	Josephine Vasquez	57	Sam Schonzeit
14	Constance Holt-Garza	36	Kaki Scott	58	Sterry Butcher
15	Dan Dunlap	37	Lauren Klotzman	59	Tex Toler
16	Dan Shiman	38	Lionel Salgado	60	Tim Crowley
17	David Branch	39	Logan Caldbeck	61	Tim Johnson
18	Debbie Sproul-Parrott	40	Lonn Taylor	62	Tom Schmidt
19	Ellen	41	Lucy Garcia	63	Valerie Arber
20	Epifanio Galindo	42	Mando Garcia	64	Wayne Wiemers
21	Erin Kimmel	43	Marianne Stockebrand	65	William (Bird) Parrott
22	Eugene Binder	44	Mary Arrieta	66	William Brooks

## **Appendix B: List of Marfa business openings with major events**

Chinati Foundation officially opens	1986
Marfa Lights Festival first year	1988
Robert Arber sets up Chinati's print shop	1989
Judd Foundation established	1994
Donald Judd dies	1994
Family Dollar opens in Marfa	1995
BBC films "Big art in a one horse town"	1995
Calvin Klein shoots ad campaign at Chinati	1995
Village Farms Tomato Farm opens in Fort Davis	1996
Arcön Inn opens	1996
El Cheapo Liquor opens	1996
1st city-wide garage sale	1996
American Plume and Feather factory opens	1996
Martha Stewart visits Chinati and Marfa	1996
8th graders design Marfa Lights Viewing Center	1997
Marfa Arts Gallery closes after 11 years	1997
Virgin Mary appears in Marfa to native	1997
Redford teen killed by Marines	1997
Riata Inn opens	1998
Lannan Foundation begins residency program	1998
Village Farms doubles size	1998
Borunda's reopens	1998
Marfa Book Company opens	1999
Marfa Studio of Arts opens	1999
Eugene Binder Gallery opens	2001
Hotel Paisano opens after renovation	2001
Maiya's restaurant opens	2002
Pizza Foundation opens	2002
International Women's Foundation established	2002
Jett's Grill opens at the Hotel Paisano	2002
new Marfa Lights Viewing Center opens	2002
Ballroom Marfa opens	2003
exhibitions 2D opens	2003
Thunderbird closes for renovation	2003
Squeeze Marfa opens	2004
Ayn Foundation opens Marfa galleries	2005

Thunderbird reopens	2005
proposed subdivision (failed)	2005
Alice's Café opens	2006
Food Shark opens	2006
Marfa Public Radio starts broadcasting	2006
Marfa Recording Studio opens	2006
The Get Go grocery opens	2007
Frama/Tumbleweed opens	2007
Judd Foundation begins scheduled public tours	2007
Cochineal restaurant opens	2008
Marfa Inn and Suites proposed (failed)	2008
El Cosmico alternative hotel/camping opens	2009
Padre's Bar opens	2009
Tienda M store opens	2009
Planet Marfa beergarden opens	2010
Midnight Grilled Cheese Parlour opens	2010
Cobra Rock Boot Company opens	2011
Fieldwork Marfa residency program begins	2011
Buns N' Roses opens	2012
Freda store opens	2012
Marfa Contemporary gallery opens	2012
Velvet Antler store opens	2012
Future Shark restaurant opens	2013
Marfa Hardware opens	2013

## Appendix C: Detail of LexisNexis Data

<b>Date</b>	<b>Media Piece</b>	<b>Primary Subject</b>	<b>Secondary Subject</b>
5/5/83	Marfans for Marfa	Local	General
11/24/85	In West Texas, small towns get smaller, older and poorer	Politics	General
11/21/86	Ground broken for private detention center	Local	General
1/27/92	Broad view indicates hydrocarbon potential low in far west Texas	Local	Environment
2/7/92	Drug Traffickers are reopening old routes in Texas badlands	Politics	the border
1/1/93	Remaking Marfa: Ayala de Chinati Presidio County, Texas	Art	Judd
1/1/93	Remaking Marfa: Main Street Marfa, Texas	Art	Judd
1/1/93	Remaking Marfa: The Chinati Foundation Marfa, Texas	Art	Judd
1/1/94	Life After Judd, Foundation at Crossroads	Art	Judd
1/1/94	Pictographs at Big Bend State Park	Local	Environment
4/12/94	Cause of "Marfa Lights" Either UFOs or Car Headlights	Local	Mystery Lights
1/1/95	Calvin Klein shoots at Chinati for ad campaign	Art	Style
1/1/95	BBC "Big art in a one horse town"	Art	Tourism
2/26/95	The World According to Judd	Art	Judd
4/29/95	Marfa set for 'Giant' reunion; The town celebrates the movie's 40th anniversary this summer with a screening, barbecue and celebrity guests.	Film	Tourism
5/28/95	Tiny Marfa becomes a 'Giant' once again	Film	Tourism
6/9/95	Prisoner Shortage Raises Texas County's Default Risk	Local	General
10/6/95	Inside Art	Art	Style
11/2/95	Donald Judd's furniture: bare minimum	Art	Judd
1/1/96	10,000 visitors to Chinati in 1995	Art	Tourism
5/12/96	Twinkling lights remain unsolved mystery on West Texas horizon	Local	Mystery Lights

5/18/96	Shedding a Little Light	Travel	Tourism
7/1/96	Marfa Stewart Living	Art	Style
8/7/96	Rare Marfa Lights Video on Internet	Local	Mystery Lights
8/25/96	Marfa lights still mesmerize and mystify	Local	Mystery Lights
1/1/97	180 new jobs at tomato farm	Local	General
3/1/97	Dumped On	Local	Environment
5/22/97	Return to Giant' captures town's big moment	Film	Giant
5/24/97	What 'Giant' did to Texas	Film	Giant
5/27/97	Art museum makes most of very little	Art	Judd
6/22/97	Questions on military role fighting drugs ricochet from a deadly shot	Politics	the border
6/29/97	After a Marine on patrol kills a teenager, a Texas border village wonders why	Politics	the border
7/7/97	Republic of Texas standoff leaves rumors of a fugitive	Politics	the border
7/31/97	Pentagon halts drug patrols after a killing at the border	Politics	the border
8/15/97	No charges against Marine in border killing	Politics	the border
8/16/97	Border town is angered after Marine is cleared	Politics	the border
8/24/97	The Merry Mystery of the Marfa Lights	Local	Mystery Lights
8/28/97	Look, up in the sky; It's a balloon; it's a mystery light; it's a	Travel	General
9/28/97	Cubic Route	Art	Judd
10/1/97	My Favorite Marfa	Travel	Tourism
10/1/97	The Road to Nowhere	Travel	Tourism
11/8/97	Even in Marfa, God's light outshines all	Travel	Tourism
11/10/97	New well may open production in Marfa basin, Tex.	Local	Environment
1/1/98	Artist balances past notoriety with creative integrity	Art	Style
1/1/98	Lannan Foundation new force in Marfa	Local	General
1/1/98	After years of debate, No to Sierra Blanca waste dump	Politics	the border

4/29/98	Art and Architecture, dueling on a high plain	Art	Judd
5/14/98	Search for dialogue between disciplines	Art	General
5/24/98	Going nowhere	Art	Judd
2/11/99	A democratic vision of art as part of life	Art	Judd
2/16/99	As crossings grow treacherous, more aliense are dying to get in	Politics	the border
4/13/99	In search of Spring Break and Marfa Lights	Travel	Tourism
8/29/99	West Texas town gets ready to celebrate Marfa Lights	Local	Mystery Lights
10/28/99	Of gaseous jack rabbits, dead Apache chiefs and a phenomenon cool	Local	Mystery Lights
1/1/00	The Republic of Marfa	Art	Style
4/4/00	Even Marfa Lights have their price	Local	General
9/25/00	Light in Juddland	Art	Flavin
10/1/00	Visual Art: Light after death in Texas	Art	Flavin
10/17/00	Light of the desert	Art	Flavin
10/17/00	Visual Arts: Lights in the desert	Art	Flavin
12/1/00	Man shots two, then self at tomato farm	Local	General
2/4/01	The last great art of the 20th century	Art	Flavin
3/8/01	Historic Hotel in Marfa, Texas, Sold in Auction	Local	General
4/18/01	On the road to nowhere	Art	Tourism
7/15/01	Exploring art's remote possibilities	Art	Judd
8/19/01	The new lights of Marfa	Art	Style
3/1/02	Marfa-lous	Art	Style
5/19/02	Large-scale art in 'Giant' town. Artists' imaginations have room to roam in Marfa	Art	Style
5/19/02	Hotel is grand again. With a storied past, the renovated Paisano gets ready for a bright future	Local	General
9/5/02	Hoping to inspire talk, artist ignites debate	Art	General
10/6/02	Chinati Foundation feels controversy won't affect annual Marfa festivities	Art	Judd
11/29/02	Journeys; where desolation is just a mirage	Travel	Tourism



11/30/02	The rail way to the USA	Travel	Tourism
1/22/03	Modernist Marfa	Art	Tourism
4/6/03	The Dia Generation	Art	Judd
4/19/03	All the sky you can eat	Travel	Tourism
5/19/03	How the Dia Art Foundation survived feuds, legal crises, and its own ambitions	Art	Judd
6/9/03	A Texas town holds fast to its ties to a classic	Film	Giant
11/23/03	The bend in the river	Travel	Tourism
12/11/03	West Texans sizzle over a plan to sell their water	Local	Environment
12/14/03	Football; not everything is bigger in Texas	Local	General
1/17/04	Journey into space	Art	Judd
2/1/04	The shape I'm in	Art	Judd
4/1/04	Against the rugged landscape of Marfa, Texas...	Art	General
5/30/04	Maiya's makes Marfa a destination for upscale Italian cooking	Local	General
8/23/04	Plains drifting Texas style	Art	Tourism
9/1/04	The Buzz About Marfa Is Just Crazy	Art	Style
9/1/04	Marfa	Travel	Tourism
9/25/04	The complete guide to Texas	Art	Tourism
10/31/04	West Texas and the Marfa Lights	Local	Mystery Lights
10/31/04	In Texas, bright lights, small city	Travel	Tourism
2/1/05	Leave Your Heart In . . .	Travel	Tourism
3/20/05	The Art Land	Art	Tourism
3/21/05	Thunderbird renovated, Capri set for improvements	Local	General
4/3/05	Land's Sake	Art	General
4/29/05	10 great places for big-city art, small-town feel	Art	Tourism
4/29/05	The great Marfa...land boom	Travel	Tourism
5/27/05	Film mystique exerts magnetic pull for tourists	Film	General
5/28/05	Finding strength, losing fear in the West Texas	Travel	Tourism

	desert		
7/1/05	50 years later, movie classic a touchstone for West Texas town	Film	Tourism
9/14/05	Artists flocking to Marfa, Texas	Art	Tourism
9/29/05	Little Prada in the desert	Art	Prada Marfa
10/8/05	Vandal hated the art, but, oh, those shoes	Art	Prada Marfa
10/17/05	Storefront in the desert; 'Prada Marfa' sculpture intrigues, baffles	Art	Style
10/22/05	Land of the Giant	Travel	Tourism
11/17/05	Mystery lights that hang over Marfa	Local	Mystery Lights
11/20/05	First Hollywood, then the minimalists	Travel	Tourism
12/20/05	Next Prada: 500 miles	Art	Style
1/30/06	Cultural desert	Art	Prada Marfa
2/12/06	Fashion meets West Texas in unlikely art project	Art	Style
2/12/06	Outsiders find West Texas, and public radio follows	Local	General
4/30/06	Unearthing Minimalist art in Texas	Travel	Tourism
5/8/06	Continental Resources joins Marfa basin play	Local	Environment
5/12/06	Undermining border security	Politics	the border
6/1/06	Lights Out?	Local	General
6/1/06	The Truth Is Out There	Local	Mystery Lights
8/5/06	Real Texas?	Film	General
8/27/06	Hollywood stampedes a Texas town, and tranquility rides into the sunset	Film	General
8/27/06	Lone Star Style	Art	Style
10/1/06	All the Cool Kids Go	Travel	Tourism

10/12/06	A contemporary retreat with a 100-year-old soul	Travel	Style
11/8/06	Tune into Americana	Travel	Tourism
11/30/06	800 very unsquare feet	Art	Style
3/15/07	Bogged down in the lore of the will-O'-the-wisp	Local	Mystery Lights
3/18/07	In quiet West Texas, residents fight an anticipated trade corridor and its truck traffic	Politics	General
5/6/07	Single Space	Art	Style
8/1/07	Sterry Butcher, 39 Small-Town Newspaper Reporter	Local	General
8/6/07	West Texas Marfa basin well logs oil	Local	Environment
9/22/07	Texas: The really wild west	Travel	Tourism
10/5/07	Culture: The other end of infinity	Art	Style
10/9/07	Art transforming Texas desert town into cultural oasis	Art	Tourism
10/21/07	The escape guide: Thunderbird	Travel	Tourism
1/11/08	The new Monument Valley is...Marfa, Texas	Film	General
2/6/08	In the desert of the psyche	Film	General
2/17/08	Oscar world; You've seen the film, now see where it was shot	Film	Tourism
2/18/08	Hollywood, deep in the heart of Texas	Film	General
2/18/08	1 stoplight, 2 movies and 16 Academy Award nominations: Welcome to Marfa, Texas	Film	Tourism
2/21/08	Marfa (pop 2,400), the desert town that will be the star of the Oscars	Film	General
2/22/08	Hooray for Marfawood!	Film	General
2/22/08	A Shout Out from Marfa, Texas	Film	Tourism
2/23/08	Back from the dead: the town that hosted two Oscar hopes Wilderness that stars in Oscar contenders under threat	Film	Tourism
2/24/08	O brothers, where art thou going to put the Oscar?	Film	General
2/24/08	Marfa, Texas, a hot spot for Hollywood movie makers	Film	Tourism
3/9/08	Incredible journeys: a trip through America's most iconic film locations	Film	Tourism

3/21/08	Rolling out the red carpet for all but the stars	Film	General
3/22/08	The marvel of Marfa	Art	Tourism
3/25/08	There's more to Marfa than mysterious lights and vibrant arts scene	Art	Style
4/6/08	Before Marfa, artist put mark on iconic loft	Art	Judd
4/27/08	Tracks of Time	Travel	General
6/6/08	Wildfire burns over 52,000 acres in West Texas	Local	Environment
6/11/08	Not quite Americans	Art	Style
7/11/08	10 great places to flag down a fabulous feast	Travel	General
8/1/08	Huge yields in the hot Texas desert	Local	Environment
8/8/08	10 great places to take comfort in nature	Travel	General
11/1/08	Bill Applegate, 48 Trapper	Local	General
11/24/08	Donald Judd's architectural fury	Art	Judd
12/1/08	MOS brings intensity and wry humor to its work on many scales	Art	General
12/24/08	Hotelier makes being cool her business	Local	General
1/6/09	Laid-back Marfa for the new year couldn't be livelier	Travel	Tourism
1/8/09	Seeing the lights of West Texas in unassuming Marfa	Travel	Tourism
1/28/09	Wide open in West Texas	Travel	Tourism
1/31/09	Donald Judd Found Perfect Canvas In Texas Town	Art	Judd
2/18/09	What you get for...\$150,000	Travel	Tourism
3/1/09	Making the scene...Marfa	Travel	Tourism
3/2/09	Border Patrol agents seize just under ton of marijuana	Local	General
3/16/09	Traffic won't stop you in tiny Marfa, Texas, but the vibrant art scene will	Art	Style
3/16/09	Not everyone sees the lights east of town	Local	Mystery Lights
3/28/09	Tex mix is a winner	Travel	General
4/17/09	Marfa lights, camera, action: 2009 film festival offers McMurtry and more	Film	Tourism

5/22/09	Negative light creating quite a gray area	Local	General
5/30/09	Tex-Mex menu has a lot to offer	Travel	General
8/10/09	Marfa lights inspire conspiracy novel	Local	General
9/1/09	Marfa	Travel	Tourism
11/7/09	Padre's Marfa: Trio transforms funeral home into one-of-a-kind bar and grill	Local	General
11/22/09	In Texas, minimalist art and maximum flavor	Art	Style
12/1/09	Halls Across Texas	Travel	Tourism
12/18/09	U.S. Buses Undocumented Immigrants To 'Nowhere'	Politics	the border
1/27/10	Marfa Border Patrol Agents Seize over \$500,000 in Marijuana	Local	General
3/1/10	Buy a First Edition in Archer City	Art	Tourism
3/1/10	Visit Donald Judd's 100 Mill Aluminum Boxes, in Marfa	Art	Tourism
3/22/10	Desolate Marfa an artsy mecca	Art	Tourism
4/4/10	A ride into the sunset	Travel	General
5/1/10	Beef, range program set for May 13 in Marfa	Local	Environment
5/23/10	Liz Lambert	Travel	Tourism
6/12/10	Solar in Marfa: Big plant a plus for 'green'	Local	Environment
7/15/10	United States : Village Farms making most of water, land in west Texas	Local	Environment
8/1/10	Marfa Best Western	Travel	Tourism
10/1/10	Marfa Blights	Travel	Tourism
3/8/11	Scene setters	Art	Tourism
3/25/11	Vandals target quirky artsy West Texas Prada Marfa	Art	Prada Marfa
3/27/11	Four hotels with spice, allure and the Liz Lambert Touch	Travel	General

3/28/11	AMG Unveils the Spring Summer 2011 Collection for Dockers in UAE	Art	Style
4/12/11	By wind, water or flame, natural disasters strike	Local	Environment
4/14/11	West Texas is burning	Local	Environment
5/14/11	Cultural desert: the one-horse Texan town of Marfa has reinvented itself as the art capital of the west.	Art	Style
5/14/11	The one-horse Texan town of Marfa has reinvented itself as the art capital of the west.	Travel	Tourism
5/15/11	Twisting truth on the border	Politics	the border
5/22/11	Radio station that turned herto faces an uncertain future	Local	General
7/15/11	On Location: 50 Years Of Movie Magic In Marfa, Texas	Film	Tourism
7/17/11	Drought has cattle ranchers concerned	Local	Environment
9/2/11	Our quirky, discerning picks for the most interesting things to do around the state this week.	Travel	Tourism
9/4/11	In the art world, no lack of Ryans	Art	Style
10/1/11	The Art Scene	Art	Style
10/2/11	Tiny, remote Marfa poised to be a rock-star magnet	Art	Style
10/27/11	A little take on Marfa's culture clash	Art	Tourism
11/9/11	Marketing can be better by design	Art	Style
12/10/11	Marfa Public Radio completes sale of KOCV-FM	Local	General
12/25/11	A new light in Marfa	Travel	Tourism
1/4/12	Village Farms Experiences Major Crop Damage; Lost 21%, Hit Yr Lows Friday	Local	Environment
1/5/12	Much adventure in laid-back town of Marfa	Travel	Style
1/15/12	The artists of Marfa	Art	General
1/16/12	The Real Artists of Marfa   Sam Schonzeit	Art	Style
1/23/12	The Real Artists of Marfa   Ann Marie Nafziger	Art	Style
1/26/12	West Texas Jail reopens after 2 1/2 years closed	Local	General
1/30/12	The Real Artists of Marfa   Adam Bork	Art	Style
2/13/12	The Real Artists of Marfa   Cobra Rock Boot Company	Art	Style

2/16/12	West Texas-based Air Force radar blimp crashes	Politics	the border
2/19/12	Getting back to the land, with no lack of comfort	Travel	Tourism
2/21/12	Texas Road Trip, Part II: Art, Natural Beauty and Quietude	Travel	Tourism
2/22/12	The Real Artists of Marfa   Jennifer Lane	Art	Style
3/1/12	A moth to Marfa's flame	Travel	Tourism
3/6/12	Minimal, Marvelous Marfa	Art	Tourism
3/7/12	Marfa Border Patrol agents seize 1086 lbs of marijuana at highway 67 checkpoint	Politics	the border
3/13/12	No Marfa Mystery	Local	Mystery Lights
3/22/12	The Real Artists of Marfa   AdventuresOf	Art	Style
3/22/12	Marfa Style hits Los Angeles	Art	Style
4/10/12	A page in the life	Travel	General
4/16/12	You're welcome; Couch-surfing the globe	Travel	General
5/19/12	Influx of artists changing small West Texas town	Art	Style
5/27/12	Hey, how did you find that place?	Travel	General
6/1/12	Marfa is on Smithsonian's list of best small towns in America	Travel	Tourism
7/3/12	The socialites changing modern art	Art	General
8/1/12	Desert America; Boom and bust in the new "new west"	Travel	Tourism
8/2/12	Marfa, Texas: An Unlikely Art Oasis In A Desert Town	Art	Tourism
8/5/12	Facebook renegade puts boot into fake friendships	Local	General
8/5/12	A world away from Facebook	Local	General
8/9/12	Social, not working	Local	General
8/31/12	Our quirky, discerning picks for the most interesting things to do around the state this week.	Travel	General
9/13/12	Nate Berkus helps to write the story of a home	Travel	Style
9/16/12	Plugging into a new synergy	Travel	Music
9/18/12	Preference for writing to aiding the rich	Travel	General
9/21/12	Our raw talent	Travel	Music
9/26/12	That old shack magic	Travel	Music

10/10/12	Jay-Z flew Beyonce out	Travel	Style
10/11/12	Hollywood goes to Rome	Film	Marfa Girl
10/13/12	How 'posh boys' from Britain are reviving the spirit of folk for small-town America	Travel	Music
10/14/12	I Quit	Local	General
11/2/12	Our quirky, discerning picks for the most interesting things to do around the state this week.	Art	Style
11/3/12	Into the wild	Travel	Music
11/4/12	An artist's truck that's no more than it needs to be	Art	Style
12/5/12	Unlikely friendship paves way for 'Marfa Girl' collaboration	Film	Marfa Girl
12/19/12	Judd Foundation Presents \$10,000 to Marfa ISD for Early College Program	Local	General
12/20/12	In Texas, a showroom for artful furniture	Travel	Style
12/21/12	Rackstraw Downes	Art	General
12/22/12	Paintings for the eye, and ear	Art	General
12/26/12	Fun in sun and snow	Travel	General
2/1/13	What It Costs to Be Me	Local	General
2/2/13	Chef Lou Lambert Hosts Cooking Camp in Marfa March 8-10	Travel	General
2/13/13	Donald Judd and Marfa	Art	Judd
2/27/13	Now the desert is just a desert	Travel	General
3/7/13	Grizzly mountain retreat	Travel	Music
3/29/13	Our quirky, discerning picks for the most interesting things to do around the state this week.	Travel	General
4/6/13	Mixing it up in Marfa	Travel	Tourism
4/27/13	This place we call home	Art	General
5/2/13	Lessons in how to play with fire	Art	Style
5/9/13	Down and Ditty	Travel	Music
5/10/13	For Lowery, it's always a double billing	Travel	Music
5/12/13	Bryan Adams and friends: Rocker-photographer's work goes on display in Marfa this month	Art	Style



6/3/13	Donald Judd and the art of living	Art	Judd
6/9/13	Square roots	Art	Judd
6/12/13	In a dark, dark room; leave the white gallery walls behind	Art	General
6/15/13	A childhood frozen in time	Art	Judd
6/21/13	Our quirky, discerning picks for the most interesting things to do around the state this week.	Travel	General
6/22/13	Road Trips USA: Break for the Border	Travel	Tourism
6/23/13	On view: Roadside Beacon	Art	Tourism
7/17/13	Arts groups bring Texas to New York	Art	General
7/20/13	Wild rides west in the land of the free	Travel	Tourism
7/29/13	Satellite smasher	Travel	Tourism
8/18/13	Space Odyssey	Art	Judd
10/4/13	Colorful guests around the Plaza	Art	General
10/5/13	US trailers with style	Travel	Tourism
10/6/13	Art; Inspiration at the end of the line	Art	Style
10/20/13	Happenings: Marfa	Art	Tourism
11/6/13	Our quirky, discerning picks for the most interesting things to do around the state this week.	Travel	General
11/8/13	Spare Times	Art	Tourism
11/15/13	Playboy readjusts its bowtie	Art	Playboy Marfa
11/15/13	Maybe this is why Warhol stuck to soup cans	Art	Playboy Marfa
11/15/13	Monastic Order	Art	Style
11/15/13	Our quirky, discerning picks for the most interesting things to do around the state this week.	Travel	General
11/16/13	Playboy bunny art being moved to Dallas museum	Art	Playboy Marfa
11/18/13	Grizzly Bear to reissue 'Shields' album with B-sides and remixes	Travel	Music

11/19/13	Marfa Girl' takes top Rome fest prize	Film	General
11/24/13	Texas: Prada Marfa is illegal roadside ad	Art	Playboy Marfa

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